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MISS HILDRETH.

A Novel.

BY
A. DE GRASSE STEVENS,

AUTHOR OF
"OLD BOSTON," "THE LOST DAUPHIN," "WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE,"
ETC.

In Three Volumes.

VOL. I.

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16 Oct 51 Marshall


TO MY ONLY SISTER,
MRS. FRANK H. EVANS,

I Dedicate this Book.

Dreams, books are each a world ; and books we know
Are a substantial world, both pure and good ;
Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
Our pastime and our happiness will grow.

WORDSWORTH.

Jan. 20, 1851
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MISS HILDRETH.

CHAPTER I.

A LETTER.

“THE RED HOUSE,
“Benton’s Station, New Hampshire,
“*April*, 188—.

“MY FRIEND,

“A clever Frenchman once said, ‘On revient toujours à ses premiers amours.’ Let us suppose this to have been said of a woman who, in her first youth, had loved a man and jilted him, and then, after many years and much sorrow, her heart returned again to him with a love and constancy unknown before. Cannot the past teach you to read between the lines? I did not write to you of my engagement; but now that it is

over, and I am free, I find myself instinctively seeking the old shelter of your friendship, which at one time was never denied me; appealing to the old sympathy to which I then never appealed in vain. Are you astonished—surprised? I am not. In those old days—whose glory is not yet faded, over whose memory ‘*Requiescant in pace*’ has not yet been written—I came to you at all times, and you refused me nothing save one thing—once. So now I creep back to the old refuge, and bid you fold down the cere-cloth from our dead past, and see if still, after all these years, it does not look somewhat fair; if still there does not cling to it the memory of those old days; of blue skies, bluer waters, sweet roses, sweeter vows, bright sunshine, brighter promises! My marriage engagement is broken, Philip. Why? I can give no reason. He was all that the world calls worthy, and I believe he loved me; yet I found him wanting. Memory is a rare and delusive beautifier, and my memory is sadly tenacious of the past; therefore I am

free. I could not be dishonest to him, even though I would. Yes, I am free, and I am writing you after years of silence. I wonder will you smile over this half-confession, and say, 'Impetuous as ever!' or will you understand, and, so understanding, send me the answer I desire? But should you choose to misconstrue my words, I can but say that I have wished to be honest, however late in the day. Write to me, Philip, or better, come to me. After all, I am but a woman, and a very weak one.

“PATRICIA.”

This was the letter that awaited Philip Tremain on his breakfast-table, one bright spring morning of that most fickle, yet most beautiful month, April. Even as he entered the room he became aware of its subtle presence made known to him by its faint, dead odour of violets; consequently it caused him no great shock of surprise to find the large, square envelope, sealed with the device

of a lighted candle and a silly moth, and the motto "Delusion" below a monogram; with the firm handwriting forming his name and address looking up at him from its dainty surroundings of silver and damask. As the face of a once dearly loved friend, neglected yet not forgotten, comes back to one from out the mists of memory, recalled unexpectedly by some trivial circumstance — a strain of music, a line of poetry, a faded flower.

Time was when each succeeding morning of Mr. Tremain's life, the early post brought a similar letter, but in those days his manner of receiving it differed exceedingly from this greeting. Then, he would take it up tenderly, holding it for a few moments before his longing eyes, and perhaps—for he was young and very adoring—raise it to his lips before he broke the seal—which in those days was not a cynical candle and blind moth, but a true lover's knot, with a French sentiment intertwined.

Now he eyed it askance for a second or more before he lifted it, and then after balancing it lightly on his open palm, put it down unopened, made his tea, buttered his toast, and opened his newspaper; nor did he glance towards it again until, his breakfast finished, his cigar alight, sitting in the sunshine that flooded his apartment, he took it up and broke the seal.

Various emotions passed over his face as he read. Surprise, half anger, half scorn, and lastly, as he came to the final lines, a quiver of pity or tenderness softened the stern outlines of forehead and lips. He laid the open letter on his knee, and as he sat motionless, the increasing noise of the shrill street cries, and the echo of commencing traffic bespoke the reawakening of the great city to one more day of toil and strife and unrest, passed by him unheeded.

A breath of the past was mingled with the present, and bore along with it the scent of fresh grass, a mingled perfume of fruit and

flowers, a vision of flowing muslin draperies, a lithe, graceful figure, dark, lustreless hair crowning a proud little head, eyes of deepest violet shaded by black, pencilled brows and lashes, a face whose almost dusky colouring flushed in an instant into richest carmine when deeply moved.

Ten years had gone by since Philip Tremain, a young barrister struggling for briefs, idle, clever, lazy, and cursed with expectations of money, first met Patricia Hildreth. He was living then in a small city, in the interior of New York State, situated near one of those great lakes so renowned for their beauty and their treachery. On account of his talents and position he was rather the *enfant gâté* of society in that aristocratic little town; which, by the way, held itself very exclusive, and counted among its residents many blue-blooded descendants of old colonial families; its customs were colonial as well as its traditions, and it looked down with contempt upon its sister city, on the

borders of a sister lake, because it had admitted within the doors of hospitality scions of fathers who were known to have made their money in trade.

To this hot-bed of traditional conservatism came Patricia as a guest—handsome, disdainful, capricious, city-bred Patricia—armed with all her little wiles and graces, a creature of wonderful resource, to be looked upon from afar, and to be judged and condemned by the narrow code and petty by-laws of the unwritten Blackstone of Hurontown. To the married women she was a dangerous siren; to the girls a triumphant, unapproachable Thetis; to the men a delusion and a snare, so soon as ever she burned them with the blue fire of her eyes, or flashed her smile upon them from the freshest of red lips, revealing the whitest of pearly teeth.

In virtue of Philip Tremain's long acknowledged precedence where anything feminine was concerned, all the other young eligibles of Hurontown stood aloof and

watched the coming flirtation, half in envy, half in pride; for was not the conquering hero one of their own belongings, and one also who had never known the arts and cajoleries of women, save as portrayed by the demure maidens of their own little town; whose manners and conversation betook largely of the Puritan training bestowed upon them by their mothers? And was not this mocking, fearless young amazon a maiden fresh from that modern Babylon, New York, where, if all the girls were fair, all, too, were more or less false, and like the Lorelei, only ensnared to destroy? Would it not be a proud boast for all future Huronites if this beautiful young witch should be captured by their village Perseus, and so changing the classic rôle be made subservient to his will and pleasure all the days of her life?

But Patricia was petulant and capricious, and Patricia was not to be easily won; both of which reasons made Philip pursue her the more eagerly; to him, as to all men, that

which is easy of attainment is not to be desired. Whether he was successful or not remained for a long time unknown to the outside world, but before many weeks had gone by Patricia had given over her superior little airs, ceased pursing up her pretty mouth, and become indeed wondrously meek and gentle, as she cast down her proud eyes and hung out the red flag of danger, followed by the white flag of truce; all of which signals signified a total surrender to the enemy.

Thus one evening as they drifted idly about in a cockle-shell of a boat on the blue waters of the great lake, she holding the oars, he sitting at her feet, the softly fading pink and amber light in the west casting a rosy hue over her sweet face and fleecy white draperies, he put his hand on hers, and drawing down her not unwilling head, told his love—the old, old story—and gained the assurance of hers.

Then followed days of beatific bliss and rapture, though both were poor, and a more

undesirable and foolish marriage for either in the world's eyes—even the little world of Hurontown, which aped the morals and cynicism of modern Babylon—could not be imagined. As a punishment for their precipitate happiness came an indignant letter from Patricia's mamma summoning her home, and peremptorily bidding her give up such foolish playing at love. What did she think would be her chances for the future if she marred all possibilities by such reckless flirtations? Was she really devoid of all sense and judgment?

The lovers parted with vows of undying constancy, and the flame of their love was kept alight by the interchange of daily letters, which, on Patricia's part at least, were the cause of considerable deception and hoodwinking. Thus the months wore on; winter came, and with it a kind friend, lately visiting in modern Babylon, brought news of Patricia's gay life in that city, and rumours of her not too innocent flirtations, of her daring public

opinion by various foolhardy escapades; of her beauty, her wit, her heedlessness of public censure; to all of which Philip listened, smiling, believing in her fully, trusting that his love for her, and hers for him, was sufficient safeguard against all attacks made upon her loyalty by those in her own home.

But when there came a letter from Patricia, short, and not very gracious, flippant and worldly in tone, announcing her approaching visit to Europe under the chaperonage of a lady rather too well known for her leaning towards a brilliant life, and altogether unfitted to be the guide, philosopher, and friend of so impetuous a nature as his lady love's, Philip aroused himself from his indolence, and awakened to dangers ahead for him and her, betook himself to modern Babylon, and presented himself before her without word of warning. Came, indeed, most unexpectedly upon her, as she was holding her little court, composed of one or two clever men, several handsome ones, a sprinkling of fair girls and

equally fair matrons ; in the midst of whom Patricia shone forth resplendent, as the planet Venus among her satellites.

Upon this fashionable throng burst poor Philip, disturbed, travel-stained, and weary. From the fulness of a young, loving, jealous heart, overcharged and ready to explode at the first touch of powder, he demanded, not too courteously perhaps, that she should instantly then and there, explain the presence of those obnoxious men, renounce her contemplated journey, throw aside the useless, frivolous life she was leading ; marry him at once, and come to him in his poverty and toil with him ; he did not add *for him*, or she might have yielded. He was not even gracious in his manner of asking, and his hand clasped hers roughly, sending the brilliant rings into the soft fingers mercilessly.

Patricia drew back her injured hand, noting with self pity the red marks his violence had left upon it, glanced down at her dainty costume of delicate laces and

softest silk, looked at the evidence of wealth in her soft surroundings, turned a little towards the inner room, brilliantly lighted, where she had left her subtle flatterers and adorers, their words still echoing in her ears, then brought her unwilling eyes back to Philip's tired, angry, harassed face, noted, although half ashamed, his rumpled hair and ill-fitting coat, his general lack of finish and repose, and drawing one hand slowly over the other, slightly shook her head.

"You will not?" he cried out hoarsely. Then without waiting for her reply, he burst into a torrent of disappointment and recrimination, urged thereto by his hurt self-love; as he, quick as Patricia to make comparisons, noted in proud disdain his provincial appearance beside the perfectly-mannered, faultlessly-dressed, languidly-interested young moths, who fluttered about the flame of Patricia's beauty, stupidly singing their sensibilities in the fire of her brilliancy. Yet none the less, though he knew and felt his

own worth and truth to be boundless, compared to theirs, he also felt that in the eyes of the woman he loved, he looked—oh, unpardonable sin—honest, jealous, and countrified.

“You are not worthy of my love, or of me,” he cried. “Go your own way, Patricia, lead your own life; I release you, but don’t for one moment think you have injured or blighted mine. If all these luxurious dainties, and all those brainless fools,” with a contemptuous wave of his hand towards the innocent revellers and their surroundings, “are more to you than my love, then is your love too dainty a luxury for me. I loved you, Patty, God knows how I loved you; but that goes for nothing in your eyes. Good-bye, Patricia, good-bye.”

She stood very still and silent while he spoke, the colour burned red in her cheeks, the fire gleamed in her eyes, her bosom rose and fell rapidly with the quick beating of her heart. She had not intended that half

unwilling shake of her head to be taken so literally, and used against her. Was he not over anxious to grasp at this chance of freedom? Were there not others, only waiting for her to declare herself unfettered, to offer her so much more than this one poor man could give? Above all, did he not snatch at this suddenly-made breach between them with almost indecent haste? Her head rose proudly. She met his look gallantly.

“As you say; no, I cannot live without what to me makes up the sum of life; luxuries, dainties, call them what you will; they have not entered over much into your life, I know; but they have become a part of mine, and of me. I should be miserable without them.”

“Even as my wife?” he asked royally.

“Even as your wife,” she answered proudly.

He said no more, but as he turned to go from her, she came close up to him, touching him lightly on his arm. His love had been very dear to her; might she not keep a slight chain upon him still, so that in the

future she might have some little hold upon him; and, indeed, did she not love him all the more because of his hot anger, and bitter truth, and loyal love?

She put out both her hands to him—her voice was very gentle and pleading:

“Since we are to part, Philip, and you will have it so, will you not kiss me once, only once more, for good-bye?”

He turned from her, unheeding her pleading voice or hands.

“Do not say it is *my* will that we part, Patricia; be just at least, if you cannot be generous. No, I will not kiss you now, I am not quite a hypocrite; perhaps one day, when I can believe and trust in you again, Patty, or when all my love for you is dead, or when I can think of you, look at you, judge you, as other men do, then I will kiss you, but not until then. Ask me then, Patricia.”

“I will never ask you again,” she answered passionately; “but you, Philip, shall be the

first to beg a kiss from me, and I shall be the* one to make your pride suffer, as you now make mine."

Then she left him, sweeping by him, proud, tremulous, excited, stung to the heart, but making no sign. He heard her laughing out joyously, a moment later, as she applauded some witticism of one of her admirers, and with a muttered exclamation he made his way out into the night.

So they had parted, and never since that unhappy evening had they met.

Time went on; there came trouble to Patricia in the death of her mother; he wrote her a cold note of condolence, to which he received no reply; then rumour brought him the knowledge of her inherited wealth, and, shortly after, of her engagement to a man many years her senior. Of her wealth he thought little, of her engagement he spoke calmly, and with the air of a cynic, who beholds all things pass by, good and bad, and says, in the bitterness of his soul, *cui*

bono? But, inwardly his love and pride were roused from their sleep of years, and he owned to himself, with a hard honesty, that to think of her as belonging to another man than he was intolerable. He had not been able to keep her love when he won it, but it was none the less a pain to find that another had succeeded where he had failed. Time, however, that wonderful physician, in a measure numbed his distress, and to his world he posed as a charming man, though cold and heartless; not one to be sentimental over a dead past, but rather one to make his power felt, and to lead and bend other wills by the stern inflexibility of his own.

And then had come Patricia's letter, telling of her broken toys; asking to be taken back into his affections; seeking to creep back into the old shelter of his heart, where once she had ruled so proudly.

Ten years had passed since he, in that sweet month of roses, had first met and loved her. Ten years; and in the mean time

Philip Tremain had risen high in the world, and in men's opinions ; his money had come to him, partly by inheritance, partly through his own hard work ; he had made his name well known, his fame was still a rising one. No need to feel ashamed for him now ; indeed, no greater sybarite lived than he, no truer *dilettante*, and no one whose surroundings were more daintily luxurious.

But notwithstanding the changes that had developed this, to her, unknown side of his nature, as he sat in the sunshine this fair spring morning, holding Patricia's letter in his hand, he judged her no less harshly, blamed her no whit the less, than he had when last he saw her, and refused to kiss her for good-bye. With her own hands she had torn the veil from his idol ten years ago, and he would not now voluntarily raise a finger to restore its shattered beauty.

An hour glided by, his cigar was finished, the freshness of the morning had departed, before he aroused himself from his retrospect ;

he turned to his writing-table with a smile, and a half-uttered : "No, not even for you, my once beloved Patty ; you have made your own life, and you must live it out to the bitter end—alone."

His answer therefore to Patricia was a polite stiff note of condolence or congratulation, which she chose, on the failure of her matrimonial plans. A regret he was unable to accept her invitation, a hope for her happiness, an assurance that she might always consider him her friend, but nothing more ; not one word in answer to the love she proffered, not one of remembrance of, or regret for the past.

Patricia Hildreth's face was not good to look upon, as she read his response ; if ever mortified vanity and determined revenge was readable on a woman's countenance, it was to be seen on hers then.

"So I have humbled myself in vain," she said. "Well, it shall be your turn next, my Philip, or my woman's wit is of no account ;

you shall feel the same sting as you have given me, incased in your armour of pride and well-being though you may be. Take care, Philip, my hand is small but it is firm to strike, and he is most lost who thinks himself invulnerable to a woman's charms."

CHAPTER II.

THE FOLLY.

ABOUT a week later Mr. Tremain found at his breakfast plate another letter, and though bearing no crest or motto, and not suggestive of violets, was nevertheless a dainty enough feminine epistle.

“THE FOLLY,

“Staten Island,

“*April*, 188—.

“DEAR MR. TREMAIN,

“Will you come down to us for as long as you can stay without becoming bored to extinction! Your favourite rooms are waiting you, your favourite horse stands idle in his stall, the yacht is in perfect condition,

and this delicious foretaste of summer makes sailing in her delightful. We are bored to death, however, for want of some one out of the common. Come and be that some one. I can offer you a pretty girl, a clever girl, and a girl of the period to flirt with successively; then there is myself, and your little god-daughter, Marianne, for common sense and dulness; while George, poor fellow, is pining for another battle at tennis and billiards with you. The ponies, my new ones, and their mistress, will be at the five-thirty boat to-morrow afternoon, to meet you, so pray don't disappoint,

“Yours most cordially,

“ESTHER NEWBOLD.”

Nothing loth, Mr. Tremain put himself on board the *Castleton* the next day, and enjoyed the half-hour's crossing to the island, whose wooded, picturesque shores, clad in fairest green, were a refreshment to his senses, accustomed for so many months to the hard

lines and sharp angles of New York. As he stepped off the boat at New Brighton, he was at once attracted by a very small boy, in a very tall hat, top-boots, and silver buttons ; then the most perfect of pony-carriages and ponies met his view ; and last, but not least, a pretty little woman in a Gainsborough hat, and a light ulster, who put out a welcoming hand, in a heavy driving-glove, as he appeared, and said gaily :

“Oh, Mr. Tremain, this is very good of you. You know I said I should come for you myself. Now, then, are you quite settled to your liking ? Let go their heads, Tony ; go on, my beauties.”

The ponies answered spiritedly to the flick of her whip ; and, indeed, pranced off so suddenly that the small atom of humanity, perched up behind, quite lost his dignity, and only retained his equilibrium by superhuman efforts.

Once on the Terrace they bowled along at a good pace, and after the usual questions

had been asked and answered, Mr. Tremain inquired whom he was to meet at the Folly.

Mrs. Newbold answered with a little laugh: "I think I told you in my letter of the three varieties of graces—a specimen of each—I have prepared for you? Here they are by name, and ticketed with the attributes they pose for, and fondly imagine they possess. A clever girl from Boston of course, Rosalie James—small and dark, and critical—reads all the newest books with the most jaw-breaking names, goes in for all the 'ologies' and 'isms,' the later the better; likes to think herself a disciple of the most advanced agnostic cult, is nothing if not cultured, and pins her artistic canons to those of Burne Jones and Walter Crane; is a working member of the Sorosis Club, the Nineteenth Century, and every other woman's club in the Union; writes for the magazines, and always has an æsthetic novel on the stocks, which never is launched. How do you like this style, Philip?"

“Honestly, not at all,” answered Tremain, echoing her thrill of laughter; “from the woman of brains defend me! What have you next to show me?”

“Ah well, she’s not so bad as she sounds,” said Mrs. Newbold, “I’ve known her do a great many kind things; and after all it’s not her fault, you know, if like the little boy in *Punch* she fails to take interest in any event subsequent to the Conqueror. And now to number two, my pretty girl, Baby Leonard, and a very pretty girl she is, in a slow, superb Juno-like fashion. I don’t *know* of my own knowledge that she ever shows greater animation than a languid yes, or no, implies; but if you feel a very keen desire to read beneath the tranquillity of her manner, go to Jack Howard for information, she is his latest victim, and he may have touched the depths of even her shallow soul.”

“Thank you,” returned Tremain, “I do not feel *my* soul intensely drawn by occult

forces—isn't that the correct jargon?—towards that of Miss Leonard; let us allow Jack full innings there."

"Ah, you are very hard to please," cried Mrs. Newbold in pretended petulance. "Now this is really my last and only remaining girl; in my heart of hearts I think she is worth the other two, in spite of her always handicapping herself; enter then Dick Darling, and shouldn't you know by the sound of her name that she is a girl of the period? Pretty? Oh, yes, but more fascinating than pretty; has a brown face, and laughing eyes, and turned-up nose, uses all the latest slang, wears a hard hat, a cut-away jacket, a Stanley necktie, and eye-glass and chain, and carries the slenderest of walking-sticks, smokes her own cigarettes, drinks Bass's ale, and plays a rattling good game at poker; and despite all her mannish affectations, has the best heart in the world. She rides like a bird, pulls an oar with the best, and can give as ugly a twister at tennis as

you could wish to see. Now is she more to your liking?"

Mr. Tremain shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear Mrs. Newbold, what can I say? Miss Darling is doubtless a thoroughly good young lady, but more after the hearts and tastes of younger men than such a graybeard as I. Do not, I beg of you, make any efforts in the young-lady line on my behalf, I ask nothing better than a good share of your company, and an hour or two of romps with my little god-daughter. I shall be more than blessed if you will put up with my dulness."

"What a very pretty speech, Philip, it is quite refreshing to my old married ears; very well, you may sacrifice yourself on the altar of decorum and innocence if you like, I will not say you nay. The men of our party I think you know; besides Jack Howard we have handsome Freddy Slade—the beauty of the day—and one or two inoffensive lads to fetch and carry. And so

you don't think either of my graces worthy your consideration, Philip? Yet I do believe each one of them owns a good and true heart, in spite of their individual fads."

"I do not doubt it," answered Mr. Tremain; "but seriously, my dear Esther, you must surely know that having suffered once in that way, I am not likely to be easily attracted again. I fancy the woman who could win my cynical and fastidious heart, has not yet come from the other world; she must needs combine all the beauties of the graces, the attributes of the muses, and be withal, like Cæsar's wife, above suspicion. Find me such a divinity, Esther, or else I shall wait for your own little Marianne."

A silence followed Philip's half-jesting, half-bitter reply, broken at last by Mrs. Newbold's lightest laugh, as she asked:

"Do you like my ponies? George gave them to me on my last birthday; Dick Darling christened them, Rock and Taffy; hard and soft, you know, or dependable and doubtful,

or any opposing virtues you choose to select. Now then, here we are," as she turned her ponies cleverly over an awkward incline, and dashed through the gates.

"Shall we join the world at lawn-tennis, or will you come in with me and have a cup of tea?"

"With you, if you please," answered Philip, mock-pleadingly. "My dear Mrs. Newbold, don't deliver me into the hands of the Philistines prematurely."

Esther's blithe laugh rang out merrily as they sped up the long avenue, shaded by the rows of graceful elm trees on either side; she brought the ponies to the door with a workmanlike flourish, and scarcely touching Philip's assisting hand, sprang out and was up the low broad steps before him.

"Let us have tea at once, Long. This way, Mr. Tremain."

They entered the library together; it was a large room and the favourite one, *par excellence*, of all the apartments in that most

charming and hospitable of homes, the Folly. On one side ran a broad, covered, outside verandah, on to which opened two large windows of stained glass, through whose mellow tints the light shone in tenderest colours; heavy draperies, of some wondrous Eastern fabric, fell on either side of the broad low door; a neutral-tinted wall supported rare plaques of Moorish faïence, and choice selections of *bric-à-brac*, with here and there the glimmer of brass sconces and silver *repoussé* ovals, relieving the somewhat sombre tone; while everywhere, in each possible or impossible spot, on every table, in every vase or bowl, a wealth of Maréchal Niel roses filled the air with their subtle pungent perfume, and caught and held the sunshine as in a trance. The one picture of the room stood upon an easel, hung with plush of ruddy hue; it was an artist proof engraving of Correggio's "Io and Jupiter." A fire of pine-logs smouldered on the andirons, and through the curtained doorway a vanishing

perspective revealed a vista of drawing-room, music-parlour, and billiard-hall, all in the half tints of twilight.

Mrs. Newbold threw off her hat and ulster, and pushing back the light fluffy curls from her forehead, called out laughingly :

“Mimi, Mimi!”

A little fairy, all yellow curls and white frock, darted through the open door, and dancing up to the pretty lady threw her arms rapturously around her; her mamma bent down her own head above the little one, and kissed the eager little lips.

“See, Philip,” she said, “here is your god-daughter. Has she not blossomed into a little hoyden?”

“A Hebe, rather,” answered Philip, “and as like her mother as a bud is like the rose.”

Esther laughed. “You certainly do pay one the very prettiest compliments, Mr. Tremain; I make you my humble acknowledgments,” and she dropped him a mock

curtsey. "If this is the result of stern law, why, commend me to its votaries."

And thus laughing, chatting and sipping their tea, they beguiled the time away, until the first dressing-gong broke upon them with surprise, and Philip escaped to his room before the tennis party appeared, flushed with victory, or despondent with defeat.

As Mr. Tremain moved leisurely about his apartment, his ear caught the sound of his own name; he stopped, with a half smile on his lips, and listened. The speakers, two girls, were evidently oblivious to the fact, that given open windows and unmodulated voices, what is sent out of one window, may enter at the other.

"Who is this Philip Tremain?" asked voice No. 1. "I am bored to death by Esther Newbold's praises of him. *I* don't know him."

"He can't be great things then, can he?" said mockingly voice No. 2. "Only

you see, Rosie, this time you're out of it altogether; Philip Tremain is just too awfully utter, just the swellest thing out in men, my dear, though you *don't* know him Boston-way. Handsome mug, heaps of shiners, Mayflower family, and good form from way back."

Here a little whiff from a Russian cigarette fluttered in. "Ha, ha," laughed Philip, as he sniffed at it, "the girl of the period, and her least hated friend; matters grow interesting."

"How disgustingly slangy you are, Dick," broke in voice No. 1; "really your language is most offensive."

"Poor cultured child!" cried out the other, with a merry laugh, that had something honest in its tone. "How I afflict her! Oh, ye gods and little fishes, how shall I appease her? But seriously, Rosie, don't you remember some one telling us all about him, and the dreadful cropper handsome Patty Hildreth came over him?"

Long ago, my dear, when she was young, and we had not even seen our 'green and salad days.' He was tremendously in love with her, they say, and was blind to Patty's little peculiarities where men and flirting were concerned, until at last something worse than usual came to his ears, some scrape more daring and hare-brained, in which Patty's name figured largely, and he cut up rough about it; Patty was wilful and obstinate, and Mr. Tremain injured and harsh, and so the engagement came to everlasting smash, and Patty engaged herself, before the week was out, to old Tom Naylor, who left her a cool million, and died within the year of her dismissing him. What luck some girls have! By the way, Esther has asked her here, she says; what a lark it will be to see the meeting of the old-time pals. Good gracious! are you all dressed, Rosa? I shall be late again, as sure as eggs is eggs, and George is such a Turk about meals."

Then the speaker evidently moved away from the window, and Philip heard no more ; but what he had listened to set him thinking, and brought a smile of bitterness to his lips.

“So Patty is coming, Patty is to be here,” he mused, “and I must meet her after all these long years. Poor, wilful, pretty Patricia !”

A few moments later he entered the library, and found the room still in half-lights and apparently tenantless ; but as he moved towards the fireplace he became aware of a tall, slight figure, severely clad in a dark, trailing gown of some heavy silken material. A fall of black lace surrounded the drooping head and fell low about the face, throwing such deep shadows upon it that Philip looked in vain for any definite characteristics. The long and slender hands lay crossed lightly upon her knees, and were guiltless of rings. Something in their attitude, however, recalled Patty to him, and, with a half-credulous

smile, he quickened his steps towards the quiet, almost motionless figure; but as he reached her side, a ripple of laughter and light voices broke the spell, as the door was thrown open, and Mrs. Newbold entered, followed by her bevy of fair maidens.

“Ah, Mr. Tremain,” cried Esther, “are you here before us? How shall I apologise? Now, will you take your introductions homœopathically, or in one dose? Girls, fall into line!”

Laughingly she presented him to each in turn, and with a careless, “The men you know,” slipped her hand within his arm, saying: “Shall we go in to dinner?”

But Philip stayed her.

“You have forgotten *one*,” he said, in a low voice, glancing towards the figure by the fire, that had remained motionless during all the gay *argot* and repartee.

“Oh,” replied Mrs. Newbold, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, “you mean Mdlle. Lamien. She is Mimi’s governess. I will

present you, however. Mademoiselle, permit me; Mr. Tremain—Mdlle. Lamien.”

The lady thus addressed turned and bowed slightly — the barest recognition of Mr. Tremain’s presence. She raised her face a little, and the light from the wax candles in the sconce above her head fell full upon it. It was a face pale in the extreme, with the dull waxen colour of death—a pallor increased and intensified by the masses of snow-white hair piled high above it, and the heavy black lace folds about it. The dark eyes set in deep shadows burned with a strange inward fire, that not even the heavy lashes could veil. Across one cheek a long cruel mark of greyish blue seemed to throb, as if in angry remembrance of the cruel blow that had caused it; the fair skin would bear its traces for life. The mouth was firm and hard, save for a nervous twitching that sometimes marred its outline. It was a countenance neither handsome nor attractive, and Mr. Tremain turned away, after the barest inter-

change of civilities, with a feeling of irritable disappointment. What right had such a figure, youthful and full of grace, to be surmounted by a face almost grotesque in its plainness? He had thought of Patty, when first he saw the quiet, dark figure and clasped hands; but as he turned now with Esther's hand still on his arm, the fleeting evanescent vision passed from him.

"Mimi will come to us at dessert, *mademoiselle*," said Esther, not unkindly. "Will you not also join us?"

"Madame is very kind, but I beg she will excuse me," was the reply, in a voice that sounded young for so old a face, and yet that held an echo of such hopelessness in its cadences, it haunted Philip's ears unceasingly, and so dulled his senses that Miss James's most brilliant high æsthetical conversation fell unheeded, while Dick Darling's most daring slang evoked only a passing shudder of disapproval.

Miss James shrugged her thin shoulders

and voted him a good-looking bore, then turned her dark head and left shoulder upon him, and carried the battle into the enemy's camp, by appropriating Jack Howard, who, by all rights, social and flirtatious, belonged to pretty Baby Leonard.

CHAPTER III.

“THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.”

PHILIP thus left unmolested save by his own reflections, and quite innocent of his own shortcomings, was only aroused from a long brown study by hearing Freddy Slade appeal in his most drawling tones to his host, as he lifted his glass of Burgundy, and eyed it lovingly.

“I say, Newbold, what an extraordinary woman you have managed to annex as a governess—capital wine this, what’s its vintage?—I met her to-day, walkin’ all alone in that beastly sycamore plantation of yours, and thinkin’ she might be lonely offered myself as a companion. By George! you

should have seen the look on her face as she declined ; you wouldn't have thought me good enough to be her lap-dog—give you my word, never saw such scorn on any woman's face before. Who is she ? A princess in disguise, an exiled Russian of high degree, or a disappointed tragedy actress ? ”

“ Oh, you must ask Esther,” replied lazy George Newbold. “ She's her latest importation.”

This was Mr. Newbold's usual way of getting rid of all troublesome or inconvenient questions. “ It saved him trouble,” he used to say, “ and gave the wife the gratification of doing all the talking.”

“ Esther will tell you, without being asked, *beau sire*,” broke in that little matron ; “ I am very much in love with her, you must know ; she is delightful, and she is mysterious, what more can you ask ? She is the daughter of a Russian noble and a French girl of the bourgeoisie. You can imagine the story, it's for ever repeating itself.

The marriage was a secret one, the young man's family refused to recognise it; he was recalled to Petersburg, and the girl offered money in lieu of her young husband, which she passionately rejected. Then followed the old story of hopeless waiting; her baby was born, and for a time she struggled bravely on, fighting shame and poverty hand to hand. But at last she succumbed, and death freed her from her share in life's battle.

"The misfortunes of the mother seemed to follow and dog the daughter, whose great personal beauty served only as her worst enemy. She was brought up respectably enough, and but for what Lord Byron calls the 'fatal dower,' would doubtless have lived and died in the monotony of a commonplace existence. Little as you may think it, however, Adèle Lamien was possessed of such unusual beauty of face and form, it was impossible for her to pass unnoticed in the rank and file of humanity.

"In ignorance of her mother's fate, the poor girl, with a blindness born of innocence, was

soon treading step by step that dolorous path which had ended for her young mother in despair and death. There's an irony in such repetitions that might well repay the study of one interested in the factors of the 'great chance' called life.

"Well, Adèle was wooed and won by a very lofty personage, who, if not of the parent imperial rose-tree, could claim close connection with it. Like her mother again, the marriage was a secret one, though in accordance with the ritual of the Catholic Church, to which faith the girl belonged. I believe the months that followed were the happiest the girl had ever known in her not too happy life. It made the awakening all the more terrible; for of course there was an awakening. Men have a habit of tiring of their most beautiful human toys, especially if these playthings develop intellect and passion.

"Let me draw a veil over this part of Mdlle. Lamien's history. It is enough to say that a terrible crime was committed—a crime

so violent and so fatal that all Petersburg were roused to action, and the imperial bloodhounds let loose to track the perpetrator. It was at this time that Adèle fled from Russia, and reached England almost by miracle. From there she hastened to America, haven of all persecuted unfortunates; and in New York she came under my notice. I listened to her story, and, after she had finished its narration, and knowing all against her, and nothing in her favour, I took her as governess for my little daughter. Quixotic! Yes, I know it was, and a dangerous experiment; but I couldn't help it—there were reasons—her eyes haunted me. And truth compels me to state that so far she has proved herself fully worthy of my trust. Marianne is devoted to her—she is little short of angelic in the child's eyes; and I openly confess to a tender regard for her. She is unexplainable, enigmatic, fascinating. But, hush, here comes the child; and *her* ears are something abnormal.”

Esther finished with a dramatic little ges-

ture that set them all laughing, and in the general merriment Philip's gravity passed unchallenged.

The story, as told by Mrs. Newbold, with all her little artistic touches of gesture and inflection, haunted him strangely. He found himself constantly reverting to it, and always with an incongruous and almost jarring thought of Patty, running side by side with his unwilling sympathy for Mdlle. Lamien.

Miss James found him a very inattentive listener as, later in the evening, they sat together on the wide verandah, and looked across the broad stretch of lawn to where the faintest streak of shining grey marked the waters of the bay. The moonlight was flooding all things with reckless prodigality, until even the barest and tiniest twig grew luminous, and the budding roses became ethereal in the generosity of its rays.

Miss James would have dearly loved to sentimentalise a little; she was not at all adverse to a mild flirtation with this hand-

some grave man, whose very presence made her feel her own littleness of mental stature. Unconsciously she dropped her usual heroics, and was prepared to be as meek and coy as any new-fledged *débutante*. Unfortunately however, Philip's mind was not in tune, or she struck the wrong chords, for he failed miserably to be responsive. At length, after a rather awkward little silence, she requested him, a trifle sharply, to fetch her a shawl ; she felt the evening growing chilly.

Almost too eagerly Philip sprang up and hastened to obey her, leaving her with tears of mortification in her eyes, and hot anger in her heart. Meantime, Mr. Tremain, quite oblivious to his shortcomings, made his way to the inner hall, where he had an indistinct remembrance of having seen something white and fluffy, and which bore about it a faint odour of white rose, Miss James's most affected scent. Surely, unless he was too awfully masculine, that soft white odorous mass was of the nature of a wrap.

As he crossed the entrance-hall on his quest, he caught sight of Mdlle. Lamien's tall figure in the little drawing-room which was especially consecrated to Marianne. She was standing by the window, her face pressed against the frame, her whole form shaken with suppressed emotion. Tremain, like most men, was acutely susceptible to tears. He stopped involuntarily, hesitated, and in another moment was at her side.

"Mdlle. Lamien," he said, gently, "are you in trouble? Can I help you?"

She made him no answer, save by a quick, impatient movement of her head.

But Mr. Tremain was not to be baffled, though he rather wished himself out of the scene, and felt unwarrantably angry at Miss James for being the innocent cause of his present position.

"Have you had bad news?" he persisted. "Are you suffering? Let me beg of you to tell me what troubles you?"

As suddenly as she had drawn from him

before she turned towards him now, and lifted her face, pale and haggard in the moonlight, full upon him. Her eyes shone hotly.

"I have been looking my dead past—my old love—in the face," she cried, passionately, "and I am miserable!"

She turned, and before Philip could put out a detaining hand, was gone. He stood as she left him, almost as pale as the wild, white face she had flashed upon him.

"Good God!" he muttered. "What a look of Patty there was in her eyes!"

Miss James waited long, and impatiently, and in vain for Mr. Tremain and her wrap. He did not come back; indeed, as a matter of fact, he forgot all about her commission until later in the evening, when she swept by him on Jack Howard's arm. At sight of her, Philip was struck by his sins of omission, and with rather less self-possession than usual, made a poor apology for his rudeness.

"Were you rude, Mr. Tremain?" Miss James replied, icily. "Pray don't apologise;

I had not accused you.” And with a mocking smile, she passed on, laughing ostentatiously at Jack’s latest witticism.

Mr. Tremain looked after them with a faint surprise in his glance ; then he, too, laughed, but quietly, as he said, half-aloud :

“ Oh, woman, woman ! thy name is caprice ! ”

CHAPTER IV.

A FAIR PARLIAMENT.

THE next morning, when Mr. Tremain sauntered down the broad stairs, that gave upon the inner hall, he found that favourite place of resort already occupied, and about twenty tongues were going at full gallop, every one talking, no one listening, while far above the well-bred clamour, rose Dick Darling's high-pitched treble.

"I say we must; oh, what a most too unutterably utter lark! Esther, you are a trump, you are a saint, you are a double-distilled daisy, and you deserve to have a free-actioned, high-stepping trotter, and a skeleton selfish waggon, for your very, very own!"

“You are very kind, Dick,” and this time it was Mrs. Newbold’s voice, “but indeed, I don’t want a reward of merit of that description, I fail to appreciate it, my dear. A nasty little abominable trotting waggon, all bones and ribs, and no flesh, and a monstrosity of a horse that would drag my arms from their sockets and me over its head before I could say——”

“Jack Robinson,” broke in the irrepressible Dick, “though why one is always supposed to invoke that mythical personage, in times of surprise, it is beyond me to explain. However, you are about right, Esther, for now I come to think of it, what would you do with your legs?”

“Oh, Dick, you are really too hopelessly vulgar,” cried out a chorus of voices, to which Miss Darling not a whit abashed, replied :

“Well, and what would you have me call them?”

“You might say pedal extremities,” remarked Miss James, to which brilliant sugges-

tion Dick vouchsafed no further reply than a pronounced sniff and shrug of her shoulders.

Then Esther caught sight of Philip, and rose in pretty confusion to greet him.

"Ah, Mr. Tremain, you have stolen a march upon us, and invaded a woman's congress, and now, since you have been so very rash and bold——"

" 'Oh, rash and bold !' " sang Dick, under her breath, with a comical Mikado gesture.

"You shall stay and be umpire. Perhaps, as you are a man," continued Esther, severely, "I may be able to drag a little bit of sense out of you."

"I doubt it," said Dick again, *sotto voce*.

"And so do I," echoed Philip aloud, at which there was a general laugh, and then a general and eagerly expressed desire that Mr. Tremain might be made as comfortable as possible, and at once admitted to the inner sanctorum of their circle.

Esther pulled forward the most seductive *causeuse*, Baby Leonard actually resigned a

cushion for his head, and Dick Darling evolved the tiniest of cigarette cases and vesuvians from her knowing little coat pocket, and striking a light offered him a "real Turkish brew," assuring him that they were "quite the knob," and that she imported them herself, straight from the shores of the Bosphorus, a fact, which none of them being strong in geography, dared to contradict. Only Miss James refused to join in the general adulation ; she sat quite still in her low wicker-chair, leaning her dark head against the gold-coloured cushions, and watching Philip, furtively, through her half-closed eyelids.

When the hubbub of welcome had somewhat subsided, and only a rippling laugh, or the *frou-frou* of the women's gowns, as their owners moved about listlessly, or settled themselves more comfortably in their luxurious chairs, gave evidence of the "concourse of tongues" that had been, Mr. Tremain ventured to ask, holding his un-

smoked cigarette between his fingers, what had been the topic under discussion, when his untoward entrance silenced the music of their voices?

"Music of our voices, indeed!" mocked Dick, bringing her shoulders up to her little ears. "You flatter us, Mr. Tremain—at least you flatter me—the harmonies must have been strangely mixed in that *galère*; I never heard my shrill pipe called anything so fetching before. Speak for yourselves, girls, I am nothing if not honest."

"Don't be absurd, Dick," answered Miss James, pettishly; "what a miser you are to take everything to yourself in that fashion!"

"Speak for oneself, or no one will speak for you," said Dick, calmly. "I always find the best policy is that which brings oneself most into notice, and if you don't flaunt your own colours boldly, no one will haul 'em up for you."

"All this isn't very enlightening to Mr.

Tremain," broke in Mrs. Newbold, in her pleasant fashion; "of course it's wildly exciting and interesting to us, but we can scarcely expect him to enter heart and soul, into the rights and wrongs of our feminine policy. Now the case in point, Philip, is this: next Thursday—ten days off, you see—will be my husband's birthday, and we thought it would be very nice to celebrate it for him in some jovial way."

"I suggested a dance," interrupted Baby Leonard, "because a dance is so easily done; one has only to put the whole affair in Delmonico's hands, and order one's dress, and let one's young men know the colours for one's bouquets, and fill up one's dance card twice over, and then you see—why then it is accomplished."

"Highly amusing for you, Baby, who never look to such advantage as valseing with Jack," said Esther, half indignantly, "but rather hard on poor old George, I think, seeing that the poor dear fellow can't dance

a step, and after all, it's *his* birthday, you know."

"I don't suppose he would think of that," replied Miss Leonard, "*I* never did," at which self-evident ingenuousness Dick went off into a frenzy of laughter, which proved so infectious that they all joined in, until their united strength of lung attracted Jack Howard and Freddy Slade, who emerged from the billiard-hall, cues in hand, to know "what the dickens was the joke?" And then, when order was restored, and only Dick going off spasmodically in little spurts of merriment, the two men were invited to remain and become members of the council of war.

"Now, Esther, *I* have an idea," suddenly cried out Dick. "I don't get one very often, so attach it when you can. Let's have some downright first-class athletic sports. There's the gymnasium, just the ticket, with all the newest fads in bars, and poles, and trapezes. We girls might

go in for the lighter exercises against the men, and then make way for their competitions in the higher science; and we could end up with a rousing good battle at ten-pins! Now that is a good suggestion. Don't you like it?" in a tone of intense astonishment, turning from one to another with a comical look of surprise on her fresh round face.

"I think it is perfectly disgusting," said Miss James, with scorn; "and quite worthy of you, Dick. The idea of making mountebanks of ourselves in those odious gymnasium costumes, to romp and riot about like a parcel of schoolboys! Besides, I don't see where George would come in, in your refined little programme, any better than in Baby's scheme!"

"Oh, he should give the prizes," answered Dick, not a whit abashed.

"Yes, and pay for them, too," muttered Jack Howard, a little maliciously.

"Well, I resign," said Dick, with the

air of a martyr. "But really I don't see what we can do. We can't have races, because the ground's as hard as nails, and the poor dear beasties would lame themselves, and we can't have a yachting contest, because all the Squadron, and the crack boats, have gone off to Newport; and tennis is a bore, and dancing is a nuisance, and you look down on my healthy little device, so cudgel your own brains, my dears, mine refuse to evolve another iota of an idea!" And Miss Darling pulled out her cigarette-case and devoted herself to a minute inspection of its contents.

"Well, I am sure, the only things left to us are theatricals, or tableaux," said Esther, piteously; "the latter are simply odious, so it must be the former. After all, it's strange how one always does come back to theatricals; they always seem most satisfactory in the end."

"Because we all believe ourselves to be the one great actor of the future," said Mr.

Tremain, with a smile; "it's only opportunity that we lack, not genius; and it's only other people's stupidity that fails to recognise our talents."

"You needn't count me in, Esther dear," cried Dick; "I never could act worth a cent, and what's more I hate it, pretending to be ever so many qualities that one is not, and never succeeding a third part as well as the most tuppenny-ha'penny actress at the Bowery!"

"Dick's severe," laughed Baby Leonard, "because the first and only time she was to have appeared in public the committee were obliged to ask her to resign, she made love in such a vigorous fashion, and charged the *jeune premier* as though he were a five-barred gate, and over him she would go, willy-nilly. She frightened him terribly, and he refused to go on with his rôle if Miss Darling continued in hers."

"Baby dearly loves a sell," remarked Dick, good-naturedly, when she laugh at her

expense had subsided ; “ but she’s quite right, I’m quite too awfully horrid when it comes to making believe.” With which little home thrust Miss Darling settled back in her chair beamingly.

“ Then, since acting it is to be, let’s settle the play,” said Jack Howard. “ It’s always a long business, and we haven’t any too much time at our disposal.”

“ There’s *School*,” suggested Miss James, “ or *Ours*, or *The Romance of a Poor Young Man* ; and oh, doesn’t that make one weep for poor Montague ? ”

“ Oh, how sentimental ! ” cried Dick. “ Why don’t you have something jolly, like *The Mikado*, or *Ruddigore*, or even *Patience* ? There’s something more in any one of them, than in all your love and moonshine plays put together.”

“ But since you refuse to join our company, Dick, isn’t it a little grasping on your part to wish to coerce our choice ? ” said Esther, mischievously.

"I am dumb," answered Dick, shutting her mouth firmly, and only letting her laughing eyes glance merrily from one to another, as the discussion waxed fast and furious, and threatened to end in tears and temper.

It settled itself down at last, however, into a comedy, or melodrama, and a farce; and when, to end all further embarrassment, Mr. Tremain suggested a ballot to decide, it was accepted unanimously. The result gave the first preference to *The Ladies' Battle*, the second to the ever fresh *Box and Cox*.

"Of course you all know I don't act," said Mrs. Newbold, prettily, and withdrawing gracefully from all contest over the rôles. "*I* never like anything so much as being wardrobe mistress and prompter, so I shall elect myself into those positions at once, and that clears off one superfluous woman."

Nor would she listen to any of the protestations and entreaties of her companions;

she put her hands over her ears, and shook her head, until every little golden curl danced again, as she cried, laughingly: "It's no use, I don't hear you, and I'm not to be moved. I have chosen my favourite characters, and I won't give them up. Now then," bringing down her hands, "let us dispose of the rôles. Baby, you must be Léonie de Villegontier, you will look the character to perfection; Rosalie, whose forte though you may not think it, is comedy, shall be Mrs. Bouncer, in the farce; Jack, will you take De Grignon's rôle? And you, Philip, I know Henri is an old friend in your hands, will you represent him once more?"

"And who is to be the Countess, Esther?" asked Miss James, with a little smile. "Are you keeping her part for some special favourite who has not yet arrived? It's the most important rôle of all, and should be well taken, or the play will prove terribly flat."

"Have no fear, Rose," cried out Dick, forgetful of her vow of silence, "I know, my

genius is once more to the front ; for whom, of course, should Esther be keeping that part, except for the cleverest actress of you all—Patricia Hildreth—don't you know, pretty Patty——” She stopped as suddenly as she began, and, flushing crimson, stole a deprecatory look at Mr. Tremain's cold quiet face, which at that moment caught a reflection of her own painful blush.

“ I beg your pardon,” she murmured under her breath ; and there followed a moment's constraint, broken immediately, however, by Philip asking quite naturally and easily :

“ Then you are expecting Miss Hildreth, Mrs. Newbold ? It is many years since I last saw her—act.”

And then, just in time to save Esther's confusion, the luncheon-gong sounded, and the council broke up, straying off in twos and threes towards the dining-room.

“ It's all very well,” said Dick Darling, scoffingly, to Freddy Slade, as they sauntered along together, “ having these miserable

theatricals—they might as well have dumb-crambo at once, and be done with it—and, for my part, I can't see that poor George comes into it any better than he did with Baby and me, though Esther was so sharp about its being *his* birthday."

"Oh, George can pay the shot," answered Freddy, carelessly.

"I'm sure it's what he's always at, poor dear," retorted Dick, sharply; and as by this time they had reached the lunch-room, their argument came to an end.

CHAPTER V.

SENTIMENT AND "BACCY."

"ESTHER," said Mr. Tremain a few hours later, as they sat together in the library, just before the time for the tea-tray and the return of the other visitors, who, at Dick Darling's suggestion and under her guidance, had gone *en masse* to deal out tobacco and small sums of money to the old salts at Snug Harbour, "Esther, did you know Patricia was to be here, when you asked me to come?"

His voice was more stern than reproachful, and Mrs. Newbold, glancing up at him furtively, thought how cold and impassive was his face. She paused a moment before answer-

ing him, and the flames from the pine-logs on the wide hearth, leaping high, revealed a half-anxious, half-hesitating expression in her blue eyes and about her delicately-cut mouth. She held a screen of scarlet Ibis feathers, as she sat in a low chair, to shield her from the heat, and her hand trembled just enough to set the scarlet feathers moving, like so many vivid fire-tongues. She answered somewhat evasively :

"And if I did, Philip, what then? Is the old wound so deep it cannot be healed, and do you, a Hercules among men, shrink from the light touch of a woman's fingers?"

"We are but courageous," he made answer, "according to time and opportunity, and the weakness or strength of the temptation. A woman's hand has been the cause of a man's undoing ever since the world began, Esther. I have no desire to become another sacrifice on the altar of a woman's vanity."

"What do you fear, Philip?" she asked, presently, turning the feather fan round and

round in her fingers, and watching him intently as she spoke.

“What do I fear? Everything and nothing. You, who know the whole miserable old story, must also know the bitterness of its ending. What do I fear? I fear Patricia; I fear the light coming and going in her eyes; I fear the grace and beauty of her motions; I fear the subtle witchery of her voice; I fear the sweetness of her smile, the studied trick of her down-drooped mouth, the soft lingering pressure of her hand; I fear—but there, why fight against shadows? I have the remedy in my own hands—I can leave you, Esther. Even you cannot compel me to see her.”

He had risen as he spoke, and moved about restlessly, stopping half-unconsciously at a table that stood in his path, and fingered absently the several articles of *bric-à-brac* upon it.

Esther followed his movements with her eyes, a look of pity and yet triumph on her face. As his voice grew passionate, she

dropped the feather-screen, and clasping her hands across her knee, drew a quick long breath; but when he came towards her again, she sank back into her former listless attitude. He stood up tall and straight before her, resting one arm upon the chimney-shelf, and looked down at her with dark excited eyes, which the slight smile upon his lips failed to counterbalance.

"Did you ask her here with some deep-laid plan of reconciliation? Esther, was that your motive? Did you think, knowing me since your girlhood—not so many years ago, Esther—and finding me fairly good-natured and forgiving, as men go, that you would take the spindle of fate into your own hands, and like Atropos of old, cut the tangled skein of my life, in the vain hope of reuniting it with hers? It was kindly meant, Esther, but—it cannot be."

Mrs. Newbold stopped him with an upward gesture of her hand.

"Philip," she said, slowly, and looking at

him steadily, "does it not strike you—do you not think—you are taking her acquiescence rather too much as a matter of course? Has Patricia no right to repudiate you, before even you endeavour to reclaim her?"

He paused before he answered, and the lines about his mouth and eyes grew sterner and more defined. When he spoke he took his arm from the chimney-shelf, on which he had been resting, as though disdaining that slight support, and his voice sounded harsh and uncompromising.

"Has she that right, Esther? Has she not rather by her own actions cut herself adrift from the usual consideration granted to women? Did she consider me, when she cast me off so lightly? And for what, forsooth? Because I was a too eager and too rustic a lover; because my outward appearance offended her hypercritical eyes; because she was but a butterfly of the hour, as vain and frivolous as the frailest *cigale* of a summer's hour; and because her world, before which she shone as

a bright particular star—and oh, what a little, trifling world it was!—and over which she reigned as a queen, repudiated me. I was not of their mode; I was not a *super-chic*; I could not speak their *argot*, or join in their light impertinent persiflage. I was too honest, Esther, for her world—too honest and too brutally straightforward, and so—she threw me over."

"She was young, Philip," pleaded Mrs. Newbold, "young and flattered and spoilt. Cannot you now make allowance for her surroundings then, and understand how terrible and impossible poverty, imperious poverty, seemed to her? You, who so well appreciate the luxuries of life now, cannot you put yourself in Patricia's place, and judge from her standpoint, and see with her eyes, what it meant, when you asked her to fling her old life behind her, and start on a new and untried one, with you alone, and you only as recompense and compensation?"

"If she had loved me," broke in Mr.

Tremain, "she would not have considered, she would not have hesitated; my love and my devotion would have weighed heavier with her than all the baubles and gewgaws of her fashionable life."

For all answer to this Mrs. Newbold laughed, throwing back her pretty head, and throwing out her pretty hands dramatically.

"Ah," she cried, "for wholesale, downright vanity commend me to a man! It's no use looking savage, Philip; I cannot help it, I must have my laugh out; your cool assumption of the be-all and end-all of Patricia's existence is too irresistibly funny. It's very man-like, and very characteristic. You never take into consideration, you lords of creation, the up-bringing, education and surroundings of a girl of the world. You forget that the very trifles you stigmatise as frivolities are the daily small necessities of her life: she knows nothing different. It is as natural to her to have pretty clothes,

artistic surroundings, and dainty employments, as it is for you to go to a crack tailor and smoke an irreproachable cigar. She cannot understand another sort of world where these elements are not: she accepts them as a matter of course, and could not fashion her day without them. Then comes some untoward fate, in the shape of a lover from that unfamiliar world, whose habits, manner of life, occupations, are all opposed to hers—as opposite as the luxurious civilisation of Europe is to that of the heart of Africa. What she deems necessities, he calls luxuries; her natural pastimes become frivolities; her occupations, idleness; her unconscious acceptance of all that money brings, worldliness; and her hesitation, when her lover and her love demand the sacrifice of all this, pusillanimity and calculativeness. And what does the man offer in exchange?—for luxurious comfort, straitened means; for dainty clothes, the resuscitated dresses of last year; for society—a tired harassed husband; and fo

recreation—perhaps a cheap place at some theatre, two or three times a year.”

“You are painfully frank, Esther,” said Mr. Tremain, stiffly.

“Yes, and I mean to be,” continued Mrs. Newbold, “because it is a subject I have very much at heart, and because it is the fashion of the day to cry down the worldly maiden, and cry up the poor, but self-sacrificing lover. Had you anything better to offer Patricia, than what my words picture? Was there any brighter prospect for her? Did you not make the sacrifice as great a one as possible, and could you honourably and reasonably have expected the change in your fortunes, when you urged Patricia’s choice, and left her no alternative between poverty with you, and her accustomed luxury without you? Do you not understand her position somewhat better, Philip, since *you* have become a man of luxury and wealth?”

“You should qualify as a special pleader,

Esther," was Mr. Tremain's reply; "but you are in a manner right, a woman's motives are always beyond a man's fathoming;" and then with half a sigh she heard him add, under his breath, "poor Patty, poor pretty wilful Patty!" and she smiled at the inconsequent words, and nodded her pretty head at the dancing flames, while the lurking look of triumph in her eyes shone out defiantly, and drove away the droop of apprehension from her lips.

Then came Long, and the tea-tray, and little Marianne, and Mrs. Esther was very gracious and sweet, and full of *petits soins* for Mr. Tremain's comfort, and withal so winsome and so subduedly elated, that Dick Darling—who returned presently with all her volunteers in outrageous spirits—declared she was "the daisiest thing out, and quite too superlatively lovely!"

"And how did you find the old salts, Dick?" asked Esther, when every one had been served with tea, and little Marianne

was particularly happy, forcing some scalding milk down the luckless throat of "Trim," her *fidus Achates* in terrier-dog form.

"Oh, as fresh as paint, and as delightfully greedy and selfish as it behoves all old men to be. They minutely inspected the 'baccy,' and one of them told me, 'tweren't his sort, but shiver his timbers if he could expect a young leddy ter know the difference atween "old virginny," and "honey dew";' and another one spat rather unpleasantly upon the new silver dollar I gave him, and expressed his rather blasphemous opinion, as to its being a 'Blaine dollar,' and only worth ninety cents! Oh, my dear, they are a most edifying old crew, and their simplicity and naturalness is only worthy of that respectable old party, and his residence, known familiarly as 'Davy Jones's locker.'"

"Dick, you are incorrigible!" laughed Mrs. Newbold, and that young lady, on whom the afternoon's expedition seemed to have acted as champagne, began again.

"There was one most particularly refreshing old hero ; he said he had been all through the civil war, and got his promotion, and his leg bowled off, at Gettysburgh——"

"Oh, but I say, Miss Dick," here broke in Freddy Slade, "he couldn't do it, you know, not there, because Gettysburgh was a land battle, and how could your old man-o'-war's man be there ?"

"He said Gettysburgh, I am perfectly sure he did," answered Dick, "because I quite well remember how he winked at me when he said it, and—yes, I did, I couldn't help it, it must have been capillary attraction, Esther—I winked back at him, and then he spun a tremendous yarn, all about his gory wounds, and bloody hurts ; mixed up, you know, with reefing topsails, and belaying mizzen-masts, and setting fore and aft sheets, and rolling in the scuppers, and weltering in his own gore, and piping up the dog-watch, and losing his leg, and fighting for his country, and scoffing at its rewards ; and I

am sure, yes, very sure, he said it was at Gettysburgh it all happened. But really now, when you come to think of it, things *were* a little mixed, and I am not responsible for the geography of this country."

At this there was another laugh, in which Dick joined, and then in the silence that followed, Marianne's shrill treble made itself heard :

"I do quite think with Perkins, mumsey, Miss Dick's the gal for my money !"

At which astounding revelation Esther gasped, and the rest of the company fell into renewed shouts of laughter.

"Come here, Mimi," said Mr. Slade at last, putting out his hand, and catching hold of the child and the dog, and drawing them towards him, he lifted Marianne on to his knee, causing Trim to stand in perilous fashion on his back legs, since his little mistress refused to release him.

"Now, Mimi," Mr. Slade continued in the hush of a breathless silence, "you are a most

interesting little girl, and what you have just told us has made Miss Dick very happy, only we should like to know a little more. Can you remember anything else said by the ingenuous Mr. Perkins?"

"He isn't *Mister* Perkins, 'cept to Sarah," said Marianne, very proud of her position, and rather consequential in consequence; "he's her young man, and he comes under her window sometimes, and sings 'Sally in our Alley,' real beautiful, and that's *her*, and I heard her tell Jane, and she's my very own nursery-maid, that he said 'that there wasn't no one could hold a candle to Miss Dick, and she was the gal for his money; he wouldn't mind putting a fiver on her, 'cause she'd run straight; but he wouldn't go much on that there pal of hers, Miss James, 'cause she was a shifty one.'"

"Oh, Marianne, Marianne!" cried out Esther, trying vainly to cover the confusion caused by Miss Newbold's parrot-like revelations, "come here to me." Then as Mimi

struggled down from Mr. Slade's detaining arms, and danced over to her mother, she said, reprovingly :

“What were you doing, to hear all that senseless gossip ? Where was Mdlle. Lamien ?”

“Poor Lammy had a ‘cruciation’ headache,” lisped the little girl, standing first on one foot and then on the other ; “so I was just put off on to Jane, ’cause nursesey was out, and so she and Sarah did their work together and I helped ’em, and they were having ‘a crack’ over the company. Is you sorry, mumsey ?” the little thing asked suddenly, noticing the look of annoyance on her mother’s face. “Was I naughty ?”

“Yes, I am very sorry,” answered Mrs. Newbold, emphatically ; “my little daughter, you must not listen to such nonsense. You must get your dolly next time, or come to me, when Mdlle. Lamien has a headache.”

“Poor Lammy !” echoed the child, “she was cross, too, and said Sarah was very wrong, every one wasn’t made with Miss Dick’s bright

face and sweet temper; but I could make myself like her if I tried to always say a kind thing and not a horrid one, though the horrid one might be cleverer."

There was a moment's unbearable awkwardness as Mimi's sage remarks fell upon the burning ears of her audience; then Esther made a move, quickly followed by the other ladies, and the party broke up, each glad to escape the embarrassment of the moment. Esther alone noticed Miss James's face, flushed with passion and mortification, and sighed involuntarily.

She had reason afterwards to remember that look, and her sigh.

CHAPTER VI.

STAGE-STRUCK.

For the next week but little was talked of at the Folly, save the forthcoming theatricals.

The morning hours grew strangely silent. Gone was the light laughter, banished the echo of gay voices, the quick coming and going of youthful feet ; indeed, to any one entering suddenly and unknowing, the air of the house was so changed and transformed they might well exclaim, "The place is haunted !"

And haunted it certainly was, but with fair ghosts in modern raiment, who, if they moved about at all, did so with tragic step and abstracted gaze, or with comic gesture and exaggerated action, accompanied by eagerly-

moving lips, from which, however, no sound proceeded, while each and all held, tightly clasped and closely scanned, one of those thin yellow paper books which Mr. French has made so happily familiar to all of us.

Indeed, as Dick Darling remarked, with a piteous shake of her head, and a twisting up of her round mouth, "There wasn't such a thing as a 'rise' to be got out of any one of them, since the craze for acting had descended upon them."

Now and then George Newbold, in honour of whose birthday all this commotion was undertaken, would come upon a solitary group of two—always a girl and a man—who evidently considered learning in couples the quickest way, and who would scowl upon him distractedly when he approached them, or seem wrapped in contemplation of the other's genius as, with halting speech and flushed face, he or she repeated their respective lines.

Mr. Newbold had been heard to declare

more than once within the safe precincts of the smoking-room, in language more forcible than polite, that for his part, he should be glad when the "shindy" was all over; and as to its having anything to do with him, or his birthday, it was a—lie. He didn't see where his fun came in, since he took no part in it.

"Paying the bills, old man," replied Jack Howard, lazily, to this outburst; "what more can you ask? Isn't that the proud position and boast of the typical American husband?"

To which grim comfort George only replied by lighting a very large and disreputable-looking pipe, and smoking furiously.

Miss James was among those who elected to study *à deux*, and had undertaken, in this way, Jack Howard's education, who, much to Baby Leonard's chagrin, had become in some manner, the clever Rosalie's slave. Baby, with tears in her eyes, marked his defalcation from her ranks, and with a feeling of self-pity and wounded vanity, sought compensation in Freddy Slade, and absorption in her rôle.

Between Miss James and Dick Darling coolness reigned. These once fast friends were now almost declared enemies, for even Dick's proverbial good-nature was not proof against the continued and unbending anger of her whilom friend. Miss James had neither forgotten nor forgiven little Marianne's unfortunate revelations, and she visited her annoyance and jealousy upon Dick, who at least was guiltless of all wish to offend ; and from brooding over Mr. Perkins' plain and unvarnished words, Rosalie grew to forget they were the utterance of a servant, and magnified their consequence until she fairly hated Dick, and longed to see some evil befall her.

Perhaps the keenest sting of all lay in the fact of her humiliation before Mr. Tremain, for, with an unreasoning confidence, she had made out to herself that Philip was attracted to her, that he found in her a mind superior to the general run of young ladies, and that consequently he might, in time, come to fully realise and appreciate her abilities, and so,

perhaps, would be solved the enigma of her future ; for Miss James was no longer a *jeune ingénue*, and the thought of continued single-blessedness troubled her not a little.

It was therefore very bitter to be humiliated in his presence, and to see the lurking smile gather about his lips at Marianne's reckless disclosures. Mr. Tremain, be it remarked, was innocent of any co-operation in Miss James's schemes ; he did not even give her a second thought beyond the necessities of every-day life ; and the fact that they were often thrown together created no suspicion in his mind, as to any ulterior hopes being built upon his words and manner. Though, indeed, Philip had that courteous and deferential bearing towards women which made his smallest service an appeal, and his lightest word a caress—as Dick Darling said, “When he asked one to have sugar in one's tea, it was with such an assumption of intimacy and entreaty, one might well imagine he was suing for one's heart and hand.”

Perhaps Miss James built upon this manner, and though so clever in ologies and ethics, failed to read aright the signs of this man's heart, and raised foundations on sand in consequence.

And still Patricia did not come. Each day Mr. Tremain looked for the old familiar witching face in the circle of "fair women" who gathered at tea-time in the pleasant library; where the wide fireplace, never empty of smouldering pine-logs, was very attractive in the chilly spring mornings and evenings. But he looked in vain. The faces were constantly changing—for Mrs. Newbold was a great favourite, and had many guests—and they were fair enough, too, but none so fair as Patty's, as he remembered it, ten years ago, and not so winsome or so full of grace.

He was too proud to ask news of her; ever since his conversation with Esther, his heart had gone forth more and more to his little wayward love of a decade ago, and though he turned his thoughts resolutely

from all remembrance of her, and sternly told himself that he had been right in his judgment of her, she was but a frivolous butterfly, and as such more unsuited than ever to him in his graver years, still there would come unbidden a lurking memory of her sweet mutinous face, the wilful lips, the flashing eyes, the silks and laces that surrounded her lithe form, the faint sweet odour of violets that always accompanied her, and he would pull himself up with a start to find his heart and mind gone captive to the ghost of his old love.

“Ten years ago !” he said, half unconsciously to himself, “ten years ago ! It is ten years since we parted ; why, Patty must be past her *jeunesse* now ; she was nineteen then, she is nine-and-twenty now, and what woman keeps youth’s fairness or freshness when so close on thirty ? Patty thirty ! Patty grown out of wilful, petulant girlhood ; Patty with suffering and change written on her face ; nay, with perhaps a wrinkle

or two, or even a gray thread in the soft brown darkness of her hair!"

Impossible! He could never think of her save as when they parted, when she was in the full flush and arrogance of her young beauty, surrounded by every luxury, and flattered by the gay homage of her little court, triumphant, sparkling, inaccessible. To picture her in any different guise, was to wilfully take down his idol from its pedestal.

He sauntered into the library one afternoon, at the accustomed hour of tea, and found the room full of people. Mrs. Newbold was pouring Indian Hyson into faultless cups of royal Worcester, which Jack Howard passed about, followed by Dick Darling with what she called "the trimmings," *i.e.* sugar and cream.

An animated discussion was going on, so Philip's entrance was unnoticed save by Miss James, who beckoned to him to take the empty chair beside her. Nothing loth

to escape introductions, he fell into her scheme and made her supremely happy ; for they sat a little withdrawn from the general group, and this made Mr. Tremain's position all the more marked. Miss James was never quite content unless what she called Philip's "attentions" were fully *en évidence*.

Dick Darling's bright eyes spied him out presently, and she brought him a cup of tea, handing it to him with a shrug of her shoulders and an absolute wink of her eye, at which Miss James coloured and cast an angry look after the retreating culprit.

"And when is Miss Hildreth coming?" were the first words that caught Mr. Tremain's ear, and riveted his attention at once.

"Not until the very day of the play," replied Mrs. Newbold. "It's rather provoking of her, isn't it? But really, you know, Patricia's so spoiled, and it doesn't very much matter. She's quite perfect in her part, and we can

have a dress rehearsal before evening on *the* day, if necessary."

"And who acts Henri de Flavigneul's part?" asked another voice.

"Oh, Mr. Tremain," replied Mrs. Newbold again. "You need have no fear, Mrs. Beverley. Mr. Tremain is *sans reproche* in his character."

"Do you mean Philip Tremain," the lady persisted, "the clever Mr. Tremain, who has such bijou chambers and who is so unapproachable? But surely, won't that be a little awkward? Wasn't he once engaged to Miss Hil——?"

But here Dick Darling managed to upset the brass water-kettle, and in the confusion which ensued the question was never completed.

Soon after the guests took their departure, and as the house party stood about the fire waiting for the dressing-gong, Esther said:

"I am sure it is high time we had a rehearsal; we shall never be ready if we go on in this lazy fashion. I have sent for Mr.

Robinson, of Wallack's Theatre, to coach you all, and he will be here to-morrow ; so I call a rehearsal for that afternoon, and I advise you to study up well, for he's a perfect martinet regarding correct lines, and thinks nothing of reducing one to abject misery by his sarcasm."

"But who will take Miss Hildreth's part?" asked Baby Leonard. "It's no use our rehearsing if the Countess isn't here—it will be *Hamlet* with Hamlet left out, and no mistake."

"Baby is thinking of her grand scene," murmured Miss James aside to Philip. "Her part is nothing without the Countess as a foil."

"Some one might read the lines of her rôle," suggested Freddy Slade, who, as De Grignon, thought very little of any other character. "It won't matter very much if one only gets one's proper cues."

"Oh, but it matters a great deal, thank you," cried Baby, quite roused from her usual lethargy. "Who wants to act to bare cues,

I should like to know? And how is one to work up into anything, if one hasn't the proper assistance?"

"You are quite right, Baby," said Esther, when she could make herself heard, "and you shan't be put in any such dampening position. Mdlle. Lamien has offered to be Patricia's substitute, and she knows the lines by heart. I think it's very good-natured of her."

To which there was a general assent, only Miss James whispered again to Mr. Tremain:

"You will have no temptation to draw you from your allegiance to your Baby-ish sweetheart, Mr. Tremain. Mdlle. Lamien can scarcely offer any counter attractions, as the Countess, to Baby, as Léonie."

Then with a quick upward look and the least perceptible halt: "How would it be, I wonder, if our capricious leading lady were here in person?"

The glance she gave him was brief; but in the second that her eyes scanned his face, she noted the blood steal slowly into his

cheeks, and the lines deepen about his mouth, and with an angry impotent throb at her heart she realised his secret, and the hopelessness of her plans and desires. She turned away however, as the gong sounded, with a light laugh, despite the dull heavy sense of her own impuissance.

Mr. Tremain was not long in completing his toilette that evening, and when he came downstairs and made his way to the library in search of a book, it was with the purpose of half an hour's quiet reading before dinner. He crossed the room to the low bookcases that lined one side, and selecting his volume turned back to the fireplace, where a low reading-lamp on the sofa-table made an inviting resting-place.

He had thought himself quite alone, and was consequently not a little surprised to see within the shadow of the chimney recess, opposite to him, the dark quiet figure of Mdlle. Lamien. He put down his book with

a half-sigh, and approached her; not even at the sacrifice of his dearest self-indulgence could Mr. Tremain be discourteous to a lady, still less to a stranger and a dependent. Moreover, he acknowledged to himself that Mdlle. Lamien exercised a distinct and strange kind of spell over him, reminding him in some occult mysterious way of Patricia, though why and wherefore he was at a loss to explain.

It was not that these two women—who had so little in common, whose lives were as wide apart as the poles, and whose interests were as diversely opposite as well could be—had ever met; and yet—such is the strong personal magnetism of certain natures—Philip, though he had spoken but twice to Mimi's governess, felt the sense of her power over him; a power so subtle, and yet so strong as to amount almost to physical force; while always with the sense of this domination came the thought of Patricia.

Mdlle. Lamien was sitting where first he remembered seeing her, well within the shadowed recess ; her face, even in the subdued light of the single lamp, looked paler than ever, perhaps because its waxen pallor was touched by a shade of red in the cheeks ; the kindly shadows hid the painful mark that disfigured one of them, but the light, catching the silver of the wavy hair beneath the falling lace folds, played about it, and across the dark sombre eyes, and thin hands that lay clasped with a sorrowful droop on her knees.

As Philip drew near to her, some polite words of salutation on his lips, she suddenly raised her head, and turning it more fully towards the light, smiled at him. It was wonderful, the effect of her smile ; in a moment, as it flashed across her face, it transfigured it wholly, and restored, once more, somewhat of the youth and beauty of bygone days.

Mr. Tremain stood spell-bound; once again there swept across him that strange intangible *something*, that reflex of Patricia, that evanescent likeness, gone as soon as caught, yet so tantalising in its reality. As he stood silent, amazed, and yet in a manner fascinated, by the singular metamorphose wrought by a smile, two lines of an unpublished poem, written by a dear dead friend, rose unbidden to his lips. He repeated them, half unconsciously, below his breath:

“Light my path thro’ Stygian darkness,
By the splendour of thy smile.”

Such indeed must have been the light that glowed upon the face of Cleopatra, when Anthony called her his

“Glorious sorceress of the Nile.”

As Philip gazed upon the face before him, and no word was spoken, he felt a sudden thrill of life and fire pass through him; the

blood leapt in his veins and flew to his face, he put out his hands entreatingly, drawing nearer to her; he felt the subtle essence of her being wrapping him around, enervating his mind, his will; and yet he had no power, no desire to combat it. For it was not Mdlle. Lamien he saw, it was not her white, wan face, with its disfiguring scar, that enchanted him, it was not her burning eyes that held his, it was not even the present he was conscious of. No, he was back again in the past, ten years ago, and he was looking his last upon his sweet girl-love, seeing the mocking smile upon her lips, the trembling hands, the piteous, defiant eyes.

“Patricia,” he cried, “Patricia!” And as he called her name, the spell was broken, the glory faded, the past fell from him, and he found himself alone; and only the light rustle of a silken gown, the faint click of a closing door, gave evidence of a departing presence.

“Good heavens!” he said at last, drawing a deep breath, and looking about him uncertainly, “who and what is this Mdlle. Lamien, that she is so like, and yet so unlike Patricia? And what spell does she own to trick me into such hysteric emotion?”

Then the door opened, and Long came in, followed by Perkins, and the wax candles were lit in the brackets and sconces, and the room from semi-darkness and mysterious shadows, leapt into vivid, brilliant life. Then came Mrs. Newbold, bringing a touch of this world’s goods in her latest importation of a Wörth gown, full of joyful content and well-being, fastening her gloves and jingling her jewelled bangles, and looking very much surprised to find Mr. Tremain in advance of her.

And so the hour passed and the spell faded, and Philip gave no further thought to Mdlle. Lamien or, strange to say, to Patricia.

Miss James scored several points that

evening in her own estimation, and felt almost feverishly anxious to have the preliminaries over with, and her engagement to Philip recognised as *un fait accompli*.

CHAPTER VII.

DANGER AHEAD.

MEANTIME the preparations for the theatricals went on rapidly. Mr. Robinson came down the next day, and found his amateur troupe duly drawn up for inspection. Not one of them, however, was word-perfect, in spite of their diligent study, singly or in couples, except Mdlle. Lamien and Mr. Tremain, to neither of whom did the text present any difficulties.

Much to Philip's surprise, Mdlle. Lamien proved but an indifferent actress; she recited her lines without a mistake, but that was all that could be said in praise of her. She was dull, apathetic, heavy, made no effort to throw

life or emotion into her part, and was, indeed, so studiously indifferent, that Mr. Robinson took no trouble to either remonstrate with or contradict her, knowing her to be but a substitute, and feeling perfectly sure of the real impersonator, who had been trained untiringly by him, and had made her *début* as his favourite pupil.

Mdlle. Lamien made it so very apparent that she only appeared in obedience to Mrs. Newbold's request, that Philip found acting up to her not only laborious, but ridiculous, and consequently shirked his scenes with her as much as possible, though not without wondering at the strange contradictions of which her character seemed formed.

The days were drawing on now, and only three remained before that one which, as Dick Darling remarked, "they were to so appropriately celebrate — George's birthday, with George left very much out of it." Now that Philip knew Patricia was not expected until the very morning of the all-important day, he

put away from him all thought of meeting her, and, with a suddenly developed gaiety, joined heart and soul in the frivolities of the hour.

The day before the great event, however, something happened which threatened to deprive the company of Henri's personation, and which for the moment, threw even the theatricals in the shade. A letter written by Mr. Tremain to his one intimate man friend best explains the situation :

“THE FOLLY,
“*April*, 188—.

“DEAR MAINWARING,

“Here I am with a strained wrist and a halo of heroism. The first is uncomfortable, the second undeserved. No doubt you will receive a garbled account of what has occurred, and a highly-coloured report of my ‘heroic action and wonderful presence of mind’—the words are Miss James’s, not mine. Well, then, to save your brain a shock, and your friendship a blow, I send off these somewhat

unintelligible lines. I don't want you repeating the tale, with mock heroics, at the club and about town, and I know your fondness for a good story.

“Let me say then, as a premise, that whatever of bravery or heroism was displayed, at a somewhat critical moment in a commonplace incident, belongs solely to Mdlle. Lamien, Mimi's governess; and, by-the-bye, I don't know but that it is just at these commonplace times that one's nerve and resolution are most often put to the test.

“Here are the facts: Mrs. Newbold has a pair of new ponies, George's latest gift, and her last fad; she drove me up with them the day I arrived, and I didn't care for their style particularly, they pulled too hard, and had an obstinate trick of catching at the bit that might prove nasty. Esther's groom on these occasions is Tony, elected, presumably, because of the smallness of his stature. You have seen Tony, and therefore know that he is mostly hat.

“Very well, this morning being bright and cool, Mrs. Newbold decided to take little Marianne and Cissy Beverley for a drive; it was in vain both George and I pointed out to her that the ponies had not been exercised for the last two days, and would therefore be very fresh and too great a handful for her, she would not listen—her sex never will, you know, when advice runs against inclination—and woman-like, she must play with her latest toy.

“So off they started, the children tucked in beside Mrs. Newbold, and Tony perched up behind. The little brutes were fresh enough, but Esther had them well in hand, and drove off in true workmanlike style. They had their drive, along the upper road, and round by the Bay, and so through the town to Beverley’s house. Here Mrs. Newbold got out, letting Marianne hold the reins, with Tony at the ponies’ heads. She lifted Cissy down, and was just turning to give a word of caution, when a cat, followed

by Beverley's setter pup, ran out from the kitchen garden and flew directly under the ponies' heads.

"Then came a sudden shying movement, the light carriage swayed dangerously, and then, with tossing heads, the little brutes broke loose from Tony's hold, took the bits between their teeth, and in a second were off on a dead run.

"You will admit it was not a pleasant situation for Esther. She has since told me that her first intimation of danger was the sight of her darling's bright sunny hair and frightened blue eyes being borne away in the rocking, swaying carriage, as it sped down the drive, drawn by horses wild and young.

"They passed the gate safely, and started off down the Terrace at a full gallop. And now my part comes in. I was walking leisurely up from the post-office when, as I neared Snug Harbour, I saw the ponies dashing towards me; in a second I recognised them;

in that second they were past me. I started after them, but with a feeling of hopelessness, for who could hope to come up with their flying feet? And though the road was broad and open for several miles, little Marianne—whose piteous white face caught my eye as she was borne by me—might at any moment loose her hold and be dashed out, or dragged in the trailing reins.

“I put on what speed I could, and as I reached a slight curve in the road, beyond which the ponies would be lost to sight, a woman flew through an open gate and threw herself directly in front of the frightened animals.

“Thus checked for a second, I saw her measure the distance with a glance, then jump and catch the bridle with one hand, flinging all her weight upon it and never letting go, though the little brutes dragged her several rods. To reach her side and add my strength to hers was but the work of a moment; the ponies, easily tired, sub-

mitted to my soothing voice and hand, while little Marianne, who throughout had behaved like a heroine, now covered herself with glory, by stepping deliberately out of the carriage and throwing her arms about the tall, dark figure beside her.

“I turned then to face my brave companion ; it was, as I suspected, Mdlle. Lamien, who stood there, calm and unmoved, the heavy lace of her veil concealing whatever emotion her face might have revealed. It was she, and no other, who had risked her own life to save the child ; and yet, Mainwaring, I declare to you solemnly and in all calmness, it was not of her I thought as we stood together side by side ; it was not her personality that seemed so near me, nor her spirit that had carried out so brave a rescue. Laugh at me if you will, suggest hysteria and nerves ; so be it, I accept the taunt, and repeat again, it was not Mdlle. Lamien who made captive my admiration and esteem—it was Patricia Hildreth. Explain it as best you can.

I do but repeat, it was Patricia who dominated me then ; Patricia who seemingly stood so close, I had but to put out my hand to touch her,—and yet—it was Mdlle. Lamien who replied coldly to my inquiries, and who walked swiftly away, leaving me with Marianne, and the now quiet horses.

“ Strange to say, neither she nor the child have received any injuries, and I have escaped with a strained wrist—my left one—which will not incapacitate me for to-morrow ; indeed, a Henri de Flavigneul with a sling will be a new departure, and ought to prove what Miss Darling would call ‘very fetching.’

“ By the way, you come down, I believe, for the play ; did I tell you Patricia will also be here ? I think in many ways this place grows dangerous, and I shall return to my own den, as soon as the theatricals are over.

“ As ever, old friend, yours faithfully,
“ PHILIP TREMAIN.”

But if Mr. Tremain was inclined to treat

thus lightly his share in Marianne's rescue, the others refused to look at it in so trivial a light. Esther, with tears in her eyes, took both his hands and thanked him with a tremulous smile.

"I shall never forget it, Philip, never," she said, and turned away to hide the falling drops.

George Newbold, proverbially a man of few words, wrung his friend's hand in the grip of a giant, and muttered an incoherent "Old fellow, can't thank you; it was splendidly done."

And then came Dick Darling, her laughing face sobered for a moment, and a look of true admiration in her eyes, as she said :

"Mr. Tremain, you are a brick; it was awfully tip-top of you! I tell you what; for downright bravery you 'take the cake!'"

But from no one did Philip receive such delicate and subtle flattery as from Miss James. That young lady fairly glowed with the magnitude of her admiration. She went

about with raised eyelids and drooped lips, as though always contemplating, mentally, his past danger, and returning thanks for his deliverance. She was also always meeting him at odd times, and in out-of-the-way corners, and asking with solicitude after his "poor injured wrist," offering to bind it up for him, or write his letters, or read to him ; which last, as Dick said, "was palpably absurd, since Mr. Tremain's eyes and brains were not injured, or out of working gear."

Philip, hating all fuss, and especially fuss in which he deserved so small a share, made the most of his strained wrist and kept in the smoking-room, or his own chamber, the rest of the day, and there nursed his rancour against Miss James for being a fool herself, and making him appear an equal one ; and his resentment towards Mdlle. Lamien, who had passed him by almost without recognition, drawing the falling laces closer about her face, and not heeding the eager hand he put out to detain her, or the alert tone in which he

asked after her health. She had paused just one brief instant, as though about to speak, and then, evidently changing her intention, drew herself up and passed down the stairs, not once looking back, or replying by a word to his courtesy.

There was a full-dress rehearsal called for that evening, and Philip, as he sat moodily in his own room, smoking his cigar, felt a half savage delight in the knowledge that Mdlle. Lamien must appear for it, and respond in a somewhat less chilling and uncomfortable manner to the requirements demanded by his rôle.

A little before tea-time he heard voices in the corridor outside, which he recognised as Dick Darling's and Baby Leonard's.

"Only think; she has actually come," Miss Leonard was saying, "and a day before she promised!"

To which Dick briefly replied, "Who?"

"Why, Miss Hildreth, of course; who

else are we all waiting for? Really, Dick, you grow very dense!"

"Oh, do I?" returned Miss Darling, unmoved. "And so Patricia has come at last? Patricia the beautiful, Patricia the inconstant, Patricia the slayer, Patricia the conqueror! Well, I agree with you, Baby, 'tis something to be sure of her, for Miss Patty is but kittle cattle at best!"

Here the two girls walked down the passage, their voices growing fainter and then sinking into silence. So Patricia was come. For a long time Mr. Tremain sat very still, not heeding his outward surroundings, immersed in retrospect; his cigar went out, the fire died on the hearth and fell into little heaps of white ashes, the day darkened, the hours drew on to evening, and the shadows came out of their hiding-places in the large room, creeping up from indistinct corners, and from behind the heavy furniture, shaking themselves free from the window draperies,

and drawing nearer, nearer, until they wrapped him all about in their impalpable obscurity, and he became a part of them, as unreal and intangible as they.

Patty was come! Patty! And he must see her again, must look into her eyes, and touch her hand, and watch the smile come and go upon her lips, just as he had known it all, and loved it, ten years ago.

And now a strange thing occurred ; at least it seemed strange at the time, and Philip could never quite shake off the indefinable feeling of the supernatural that then enveloped him, whenever in after years he recalled that evening.

His rooms were situated in what was known as the "bachelor wing" of the Folly, though not separated from the main corridor, as were the other apartments of that class. He knew that next to his chamber was what was called the Green Room, occupied by Miss James and Dick Darling, while on the other side was the dressing-room belonging to his suite, and used by his man-servant ;

the remaining rooms beyond were bachelor apartments, separated from the main part of the house by a heavy baize door, that cut off all sound. He also knew that the fair occupants of the Green Room were at that hour sipping tea and scandal in the library, and his man flirting with the maids in the hall. To all intents and purposes he was absolutely alone, as no sound of arriving guests could reach him, the greater spare rooms being situated in the west wing. Marianne and Mdlle. Lamien's apartments were in the main corridor, but a storey above. All this flashed across Mr. Tremain's mind in a second, though it has taken somewhat long to explain.

As he sat brooding in the chill dim shadows, conjuring up the ghosts of by-gone years, and speculating moodily upon the fate that had marred his life, and the strange, inconsistent, unwilling homage he even yet bore for the woman who had played the part of a gay mocking Cassandra to him, and

with a dreary pessimist philosophy accepted his destiny as inevitable, he became suddenly aware of a faint subtle perfume, that stole over his senses imperceptibly, which he recognised physically to be the odour of violets. And as this sweet scent swept over him, there came before him vividly, a sudden sharp remembrance of the past, while the words of the poet rose unconsciously to his lips :

“—I think of the passion that shook my youth,
Of its aimless love and its idle pains,
And am thankful now for the certain truth
That only the sweet remains.”

He was no longer Philip the successful, resting in his easy-chair, the idol of the hour at the Folly ; but he was Philip the ardent, and the impecunious ; Philip in a badly made coat, heated and travel-stained, hurt and angry ; standing in a room that was dainty in its luxury of flowers and half lights, with a vision of a drawing-room beyond, brilliantly lighted, softly coloured, and from whence came the echo of gay laughter, and bright voices.

And now from out that room came slowly,

ah, how slowly, to his wildly beating heart, a tall slight figure, clad in softest silks and laces, with a breast-knot of violets; and as the vision advanced nearer and stood half within the shadow of the outer room, he could see the soft fair face, crowned with its dead-brown hair, and wearing a look half frightened, half pleading in the sweet eyes, and on the arched and trembling lips.

Slowly, slowly the figure drew nearer to him; now it was but a few paces off, he could almost touch it with his hand, he could see the violets rise and fall with the lace upon her bosom; their scent came to him strong, and sweet, and pungent. He sprang from his chair, and held out his hands.

“Patty!” he cried, “Patty, have you come to find me, my little Patty?”

But even as he spoke the vision faded; there came one clear loud whisper, calling his name, “Philip! Philip!” and then, even as he looked, the shining lights were gone, the gaily echoed voices silent, the figure grew indistinct and unreal, and then vanished, and

Philip found himself standing in the middle of the room, gazing on vacancy, with only the sad perfume of violets left on the air.

He sank back into his chair, bewildered, exhausted, and as he did so, a strain of saddest music reached his ears, and a voice that was almost a monotone, and yet that struck an answering chord of misery in his heart, said, rather than sang, some words that ran in this wise :

“I am a woman,
Therefore I may not
Call to him, cry to him,
Bid him delay not ;
Showing no sign to him,
By look of mine to him,
What he has been to me,
Pity me, lean to me,
Philip, my king !”

The voice ceased, and Mr. Tremain, his composure gone, his heart beating wildly, cried out again, this time with a ring of deepest passion :

“Patricia! Patty, have you come back to me ?”

But it was not Patty's sweet voice he knew so well, that made answer, it was a far higher, lighter treble that cried out, as the door was flung open impetuously :

"Oh, Mr. Tremain, how very dull and mopy of you ! All alone, in the dark, and no fire !" And Mrs. Esther swept in, trailing her plush tea-gown after her, followed by Perkins with a lamp, and Long with a silver tray set with a tea equipage.

"Dear me !" continued Mrs. Newbold, coming nearer, and blinking her eyes in affected short-sightedness, "how very dismal you look, and how very cold you feel ! Here, Perkins, make up the fire directly. I have come to give you your tea, Philip, I am sure you need it, for you look as white as a ghost, and as dazed as a clairvoyant ! Put the tray here, Long," drawing up a small table, "there, that will do ; now tell your master to come to Mr. Tremain's sitting-room, immediately." Then as the two servants withdrew, she added with a comical

little grimace, "now for ten minutes, until George can join us, my reputation is at stake! Isn't it awful? and I who have known you since my days of short frocks and pig-tails!" Then with a light laugh, "I knew you would be dull, Philip, I always think it's very trying work posing for a hero, and you know we all insist upon your personating that most uncomfortable character, whether you like it or not, so if I were you I'd get all the glory out of it that's possible! Now then, here's a cup of tea for you," and she jumped up, carrying it over to him, where he sat, half hidden in his arm-chair.

The newly kindled fire flashed up as she came to him, and shining full upon him, revealed the whiteness of his face, and the look of introspection in his eyes.

"Are you not well, Philip?" she asked; and then before he could reply, "Why, what a delicious odour of violets! You dear thing, have you got some for me?"

But Mr. Tremain made no answer; he

put out his hand and took the cup from her, saying as he did so: "Then you, too, perceive it, Esther; it *is* the odour of violets, is it not, and yet I have none for you."

"Of course it's violets," replied Mrs. Newbold, positively, "and of course you are hiding them from me. Ah, well, I don't mind, I dare say you are keeping them for *some one*," and she smiled a little fine smile of superiority and knowledge.

After a moment's pause Mr. Tremain asked another question, and in spite of his attempted carelessness, his voice had a ring of anxiety.

"Esther, who—who was singing, just now, when you came in, or a moment before?"

"Singing?" queried Mrs. Newbold. "Oh, no one; they are all far too busy discussing this evening's rehearsal; though, stay a moment—yes, I remember now, I did hear some one grinding out a melancholy ditty, as I came down the corridor. Of course, it was Mdlle. Lamien."

"Mdlle. Lamien?" echoed Philip.

“Yes,” replied Esther, “she has a little, tiny room in this very wing, where she keeps a piano and some books; you might hear her here, it’s just possible.”

But Mr. Tremain was not heeding her. Once again he was overwhelmed and confused as the strange spell of this woman’s personality crept over him. He could have sworn the voice was Patricia’s, just as the face of his vision had been Patricia’s! Was he always to be haunted by this strange dual resemblance — which was no resemblance — between the Patricia of his youth, and this incomprehensible, mysterious stranger?

If the voice was the voice of Mdlle. Lamien, why should it affect him so strongly, or why should it seem but the fitting adjunct to the face of his vision, since that vision wore the semblance of Patricia?

“But whether she came as a faint perfume,
Or whether a spirit in stole of white,
I feel, as I pass from the darkened room,
She has been with my soul to-night!”

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ARRIVAL AND A MEETING.

WHEN Mr. Tremain entered the drawing-room later in the evening, he was at once conscious of Patricia's presence. It did not require the practical use of his eyes to assure himself of the fact, for to him the room and the company were permeated with her personality.

It had always been so with Patricia. When she entered an assembly she drew to herself all the light and vivacity and beauty of the scene ; and the homage which was always immediately accorded her, seemed but a fitting tribute to her fascinations.

Other women, by far more beautiful, paled

before the witchery of her face ; other wits, whose slightest expression was a *bon-mot*, faded into insignificance when she entered the lists.

And yet she was neither very beautiful, nor very *spirituelle* ; but she possessed in a rare degree that nameless *something*, that charm of presence, of voice, of manner, which is unconquerable because intangible, and against which it is worse than useless to resist. It is a dangerous attribute, and heavy is the responsibility of those who possess it ; it may lead them and others to the highest feats of heroic sacrifice, and it may doom them to the lowest depths of the woe that is eternal.

Philip, as he crossed the room, looked not so much for Patricia herself, but rather to where the black coats gathered thickest, and the tinkling sound of gay laughter and careless *persiflage* waxed loudest ; there he knew he should find Miss Hildreth, for was she not the candle about which the silly

moths gathered eagerly, glad to singe their humble wings, or even spend their lives, if only once the flame of her brilliancy might rest upon them, and lift them for a moment from the dull round of commonplace?

The seal she affected was indeed a typical one, he thought, as he moved towards her with a slight smile upon his lips, his face still pale from his recent emotion; and was he any better than his fellows? Were not his unwilling feet moving towards her, drawn as the needle to the magnet? Was not his heart beating tumultuously at the thought of holding her hand in his once more? Was he not, in fact, the silliest of all human moths, since he, who knew by experience the cruelty of that flame, yet sought it wantonly, glad to bask again for a brief half-hour in its baleful light? As he came close to where sat Miss Hildreth, a queen of a mimic court, the knot of adorers and worshippers fell back, and accorded him, as of a right, a free passage to the lady of

their allegiance. In a moment the hum of general conversation ceased; even Mrs. Newbold, who had watched his entrance with only half-suppressed excitement, felt the words die upon her lips, while Miss James made no pretence of even listening to her cavalier as she noted with flashing eyes and sullen heart the meeting of these whilom lovers, and Dick Darling, with sympathy written on every line of her fresh young face, laid an impetuous hand on Jack Howard's arm, drawing him a step or two nearer the charmed circle. Thus watched by every eye, and almost in total silence, Mr. Tremain bowed low before Patricia, holding out his hand, as he said in his most deferential tones:

“May I hope that Miss Hildreth still keeps a place for me in her remembrance, although it is so long since we last met?”

And now surely, if ever, Patricia earned for herself the character so freely bestowed upon her, of petulance and inconstancy. She

raised her head a trifle haughtily as she replied, and so managed as not to see Mr. Tremain's outstretched hand, while her words fell cold and cutting :

“Can Mr. Tremain expect any woman to remember ten years back and own to it?”

Then she laughed, a cool, well-trained little defiant laugh, and turned nonchalantly to a tall, dark, foreign-looking man, who alone of all her court had refused to fall back as Philip approached her. The slight was a direct one, but if it told, the hurt was invisible to the world, for Mr. Tremain, smiling a little more indulgently, answered her no less coolly :

“That Miss Hildreth should remember the number of years since we met is answer sufficient, and too great an honour.”

Then he bowed again, and turned away, and the crowd of eager satellites moved up closer and filled the gap ; only Miss James remarked the wave of angry colour that

swept across Patricia's face, and for an instant dyed it crimson.

Meantime, Mr. Tremain moved quietly back, and stationed himself where, half-hidden by the heavy falling *portières*, he could study unseen the face and form of the woman on whom for ten long years he had bestowed the greatest love of his life.

It was with keenest eyes of disapproval that he noted each change in her, changes that to him seemed indicative only of the interior alteration that had come over her, and that while it gave her the polished brilliancy of a costly gem, he felt was gained only by some corresponding loss of heart.

Miss Hildreth was dressed in white, without a spot of colour save for the large bouquet of Parma violets that lay unheeded on her lap. Her costume, though simple in the extreme, yet bore evidence, even to Philip, of its costliness, and reminded him sadly, with its soft silken folds and filmy laces, of the dress in which he had last seen her.

Evidently these baubles of fashion had not lost their charm to Patricia. Mr. Tremain in his character of critic saw only artificiality in each little curl that formed the coronal of soft, dusky hair, crowning the small delicate head; he read worldliness in each guarded laugh, each well-modulated tone; he descried vanity and pride in the very gestures of her hands—those little hands that had once rested so trustingly in his, and on which he had showered so many hot, youthful kisses. He noted every turn of her head, every line of her sweet face, every movement of the slim upright form, and to him it seemed as though a cold hard imperceptible coating of worldly artifice and selfishness wrapped her around and about, as hard and keen and impregnable as any corslet of triply-tried steel, from which all shafts of remembrance, affection, compassion, or naturalness, glanced off harmless, not leaving even a dent behind upon the polished surface.

This, then, was Patricia after ten long years? This was the woman of his love. This was the wilful Patty for whom Esther Newbold had pleaded so generously, and towards whom his heart had become as wax in the fire of tender remembrance. This was the reality of his vision; he had come from the presence of that spiritual Patty face to face with the real Patricia, and so coming his heart and soul had been moved with love and compassion towards her; he had yearned to make all right between them, to forget the past, to knit together the broken skein of their two lives, to be, in fact, magnanimous and generous, to hold out the hand of forgiveness and reconciliation, and to welcome in return a heart-broken, remorseful, penitent Patricia, who should fall upon his heart with glad gratitude, while she owned herself vanquished and grateful for the immensity of his goodness and patronage.

And he had found instead of this imagi-

nary Patty a woman of the world, unmoved by his presence, irresponsive to his generosity, unconscious of her own shortcomings, unremorseful for the past, in fact, forgetful of it and of him ; who, with cool insolence, overlooked his outstretched hand, and, with the well-bred impertinence of her class, made plain her indifference to him. Well, and was he not right when he told Esther Newbold that he would not consent again to play the fool to a woman's vanity ? Had he not read aright Miss Hildreth's character when she scorned him ten years ago, and withdrew her love, because of his poverty and his bucolic indifference to the *petits soins* of her every-day life ? Had he judged her too harshly ? No ; a thousand times no ! Her character was but in bud then, and he had only too well foreseen how bitter would be the blossom, though so fair in outward seeming.

Ah, well ! Let the dream vanish, the vision fade ! He had been but allured by the

Lorelei of desire, and, however near he had approached to the scorching flame of her seductions, he had come forth unscathed.

His meditations were here interrupted by a touch on his shoulder, and George Newbold's pleasant voice in his ear.

"I say, Tremain, I want to introduce some one to you——. Oh, no, my good fellow, *not* a woman; I am too much your friend to betray you in such a fashion. It's a man for whom I bespeak your politeness—a man, and not a brother, since he is a foreigner."

Mr. Newbold, after this, for him, very long speech, stopped to take breath, and, as he did so, patted Philip affectionately on the shoulder.

"There he is," he continued, presently, moving Mr. Tremain about, and motioning towards the crowd that still surrounded the spot where sat Patricia. "Don't you see him? Tall, dark man, pasty face and black eyes, wears a red ribbon in his button-hole

that fetches all the women—there, bending over Miss Hildreth ! By Jove ! he's scarcely left her side since I presented him. She's a witch, is Miss Patty—a witch with a long head, and minus a broomstick."

"Who is he ?" asked Philip, not particularly impressed by the stranger's appearance. "Where on earth did you pick him up, and what the devil made you bring him down here ?"

"He picked me up, don't you see ?" replied George Newbold, not in the least put out by Philip's evident bad temper. "Found him at the Club—the Union, you know. Townsend had introduced him, and made him a stranger member. He brought a line of introduction to Townsend from Jim Goelet, who knew him in Paris. Townsend said he had been asking for me—knew my name, he said, from hearing the Goelets speak of me so often—awfully kind of Jim and Ada, I'm sure—so he wanted to know me, and I couldn't do less than be civil, so I asked him down for the theatricals

—my birthday, you know—and he leaped at my fly at once, so here he is.”

“I don’t like him,” said Mr. Tremain, didactically. “What’s his name, Newbold, and where does he hail from?”

“Here’s his card,” replied George, pulling it out of his waistcoat-pocket. “I thought I had better be sure about it because of introducing him, you know. The women do get so savage when you leave a fellow’s patronymic vague. Bless them, the dears! They’ve got their ‘*Almanach de Gotha*’ at their fingers’ ends, and know to a fraction’s nicety just how cordial they should be to each individual mother’s son of them. So many smiles and graciousness to the elder son of a peer, so many less to an Honourable, and so many less again to a younger detrimental. The women of this country, my dear Tremain, are mad, simply mad over titles. It’s the irony of history. What our forefathers fought and died for—equality, and the abolishment of mere hereditary rights—their grandchildren

fall down and worship. For my part, I wonder the stern old Puritans don't turn in their graves with horror!"

The card which Mr. Tremain held bore the name of Count Vladimir Mellikoff, and had no address save a pencilled one—"Brevoort House"—in one corner. The bit of paste-board was as non-committal as the stranger's face.

"Is he a Russian?" asked Philip.

"It looks so, doesn't it?" was the careless reply. "'A Roosian or a Proosian,' but certainly *not* 'an Englishman.' Perhaps he's a Nihilist in disguise, perhaps he's a dynamiter, or a Land-leaguer, or a red-handed Communist, who knows? At any rate, he's got his match in Miss Patty; never saw such a case of 'bowl over' at first sight in my life, never, I give you my word."

But Philip failed to rejoice in Mr. Newbold's hilarity; and that gentleman strolled off presently, in his peculiarly aimless fashion, and securing Count Vladimir Mellikoff by

the simple device of slipping his hand within his arm, led him up to Philip, presenting him with all due ceremony.

Mr. Tremain, contrary to the traditions of his country, and taking a leaf from Patricia's own book, passed by the foreigner's outstretched hand, and with a somewhat forbidding manner and bow, entered into conversation.

Count Vladimir, however, was not to be easily distanced or put down; he could with rare tact suit his manner and his words to the individual of the moment who formed his audience; so now, with his usual keen insight, while discovering Mr. Tremain's half-formed distrust and dislike, he also recognised his superior intellect and position, and set himself to work at once to dispel the unfavourable impression he had made. He had not learned his earliest lessons in diplomacy at Europe's politest Court, Petersburg, for nothing, therefore it was not long before Philip found his suspicions and scepticism melting beneath the charm of his manner,

and his cultivated, modest conversation. He learned without trouble, that Count Mellikoff was travelling in the States for pleasure principally, though with a suspicion of political business to give interest to his visit; that he was a diplomat by birth and training, and a loyal servant to the present Tsar of all the Russias, whom he served with the like love and fidelity he had formerly bestowed upon Alexander II.

He was a distinguished-looking man, rather than handsome, with an air of breeding and distinction in the thin face, keen small black eyes, aquiline nose and broad, rather pointed forehead. His manners were self-possessed and quiet, he spoke English fluently, and in a pleasantly modulated voice, while the few gestures he used were indicative of absolute self-control. Mr. Tremain soon discovered that nothing escaped his observation, he was aware of every movement of the various groups scattered about the drawing-rooms, and while apparently absorbed in the topic of

the moment, had the attribute of prescience so widely developed as to be conscious of the general tone of conversation throughout the room.

Philip acknowledged himself fascinated, and ere long dropping his habitual reserve, he entered cordially into Count Vladimir's graphic descriptions of life in Petersburg. By degrees the conversation glided on to more intimate grounds, and Philip found himself asking somewhat bold questions as to a certain Russian practice in which he had long been much interested. Count Mellikoff replied frankly and with great openness, and only laughed a little indulgently when Mr. Tremain advanced gingerly upon the spy system of the Tsar's Government. His remarks were firm and to the point, and the Count became more and more earnest as he refuted them, giving his interlocutor, every now and then, a keen and searching look.

"You cannot deny, Count Mellikoff," said Mr. Tremain at last, speaking with more than

his usual animation, "that the spy system, as practised by your Government, makes of every true Russian a special constable, whose work is well understood, and whose life is devoted to the espionage, not only of suspects, but of every Russian citizen. You become, in fact, individual policemen, and you each watch the other with keenest scrutiny, ready at any moment to denounce and arrest each other."

"Why should I deny it, my dear sir?" answered the Count, very quietly. "It would be but useless waste of breath on my part, since all the world looks with awe and wonder on the workings of the Imperial Chancellerie of Petersburg. Nay, so far from denying it, let me give you some faint idea of its workings, and of the far-reaching, all-powerful engines it employs. Our system is divided into two sections, one of which is devoted to all international or foreign questions; the other deals only with the surveillance of the Tsar's subjects, who, for the time being, are

non-resident or abroad. Our agents of the first section are generally well known; as a rule they make no secret of their connection with the Imperial Chancellerie, and they consist of both sexes and of all classes. Indeed, we find our cleverest work often accomplished by ladies. I need but mention Madame Novikoff, whose influence and power over a certain Premier of England is but a matter of common *on dits*, and who, at one time, seriously affected the foreign policy of Great Britain. That work accomplished, she has wrought further mischief to Her Majesty's Government by encompassing the defection of Dhuleep Singh and enrolling him under Russia's flag. It is not beside the question, sir, if, in the future, he does not become a source of trouble to the British authorities at Calcutta. That, sir, is one woman's work. On the Continent, again, I could point out to you, in almost every city of importance, a like emissary. In Paris there was the charming

Princess Lise Troubetskoi, followed now by that Marquis de —— and his fascinating wife, whose hotel is the gathering-place of all the *élite*, and whose identity is as strictly unknown now as when first they startled all Paris by the magnificence of their entertainments. At Brussels you will find Madame de M——; at Dresden, the Countess de B——; in Switzerland, the Prince A. P——; and at Rome, the Marquise di P——. Even Egypt is not forgotten, and in the Countess J—— Russia finds an able coadjutor, whose position as lady-in-waiting to the vice-Queen gains for us many secrets communicated by the British Government to the Khedive. And even you, sir, must remember the great noise regarding Madame Blavatsky, who, as the priestess of theosophy, for many years carried on a secret correspondence with Monsieur Zinovieff, then Chief of the Asiatic Department of the Foreign Office, and with Prince Doudaroff Korsakoff, Governor-General of the

Caucasus? But for Lord Dufferin's clear-sightedness, Madame might still be carrying on her patriotic work."

"You astonish me, Count Mellikoff," said Mr. Tremain, as his informant stopped to draw breath; "I knew that 'the little father' held undoubted sway over all his own vast territory, but not that he bisected other nations with such regular and effective engines."

Count Mellikoff smiled, and the fire in his deep-set eyes leapt up, as he answered:

"Sir, this is but a small portion of the all-powerful protection bestowed on his children by our father, the Tsar. Even here, in your own land of equality and freedom, his emissaries are ever at work, and from every capital of Europe, indeed from many insignificant towns and villages, there go forth daily weekly or monthly reports to the Imperial Chancellerie at Petersburg. Is it not useless, then, for any one individual to fight against so omnipotent and universal a power?"

“Worse than useless, I should say,” replied Philip, wondering within himself as he spoke, what part was played in the great political drama by this same quiet, well-bred gentleman who stood before him.

“But this,” continued Count Mellikoff, smiling again, and turning his intensely black eyes, in which no pupil was visible, but all seemed iris, full upon Mr. Tremain, “this is but one section of the great organisation, and in some ways the most insignificant. The second section, which has to do directly with the Tsar’s subjects abroad, is of much vaster proportions, and wields a far greater power. If you will permit me, sir, to introduce dry statistics?” And the Count drew from his pocket a small but substantial note-book, which he held unopened, waiting for Mr. Tremain’s reply.

Philip bowed a trifle impatiently, as he said: “I beg you will continue, Count Mellikoff; statistics are the back-bone of political

economics in all countries; to me they bear a special charm."

"I thank you, sir," replied the Count, who evidently was a literal translator of the polite Gaelic, *Monsieur*. He opened the note-book, and turned over the pages carefully and with a practised hand.

"Ah!" he said at last, "I have it. Listen, sir, to a quotation from the reports of the Chancellerie: 'In the year 1884, no less than 890,318 Russian subjects of the Tsar crossed the Western frontier, for the purpose of paying more or less prolonged visits to foreign countries. The next year the numbers had increased to 920,563;' and you must bear in mind that I do not exaggerate when I assert that every one of these travellers is subjected to the same amount of espionage abroad as at home. Their every movement is noted, every remark reported, every change of residence recorded. There lives no true-born and loyal Russian who is not bound by conscience, if not by oath, to report to Petersburg

anything that may seem to him suspicious, or amiss, in any of his fellow-countrymen. It may be only a word, a look, a letter, a handshake, nothing is too trivial, because out of trivialities have grown the great revolutions of the world. You may be living in India, China, England, or America; you may be rich and noble, or poor and dependent; if you are one of the Tsar's children, you may be very sure that every day and hour of your life is known, nay, is commented upon and discussed within the Imperial Chancellerie, no matter how many thousands of miles of sea and land separate you from Russia. At any moment the Tsar can call you to account; he is no respecter of persons; it may be the highest noble at the Court, the poorest serf on the steppes, the fashionable beauty of the hour, the hired governess of your children, the maid of your toilette, the *valet de place*; the very highest and the very lowest, one and all must obey when the voice of the Tsar of all the Russias speaks the word of command. No

crime can be so hidden but it will be unearthed, no reparation accepted unless appointed by Imperial edict, no forgiveness sanctioned unless granted by word of the Tsar. Said I not right, sir, is it not a grand and wonderful system, this that puts to shame Nature's barriers, and acknowledges no limits to its power, save its own Imperial will?"

Count Mellikoff ceased speaking, and Philip, looking at him, saw his face for one moment lit with the mocking fires of conscious malignity and indomitable, cruel perseverance. For one moment only; but in that moment the fierce light of his eyes seemed to scorch all who came within its radiance—nay, seemed even to traverse the long room and touch Patricia with its malevolence. Then the passion faded, and the Count stood quietly before him, a smile on his lips, the black note-book clasped firmly between the long, thin fingers of both hands.

Mr. Tremain felt all his original dislike and mistrust rush full upon him once more.

He for one moment felt actual hatred for this calm, composed foreigner, and his quiet, well-tutored face, his low voice and persuasive manner, and, above all, for the horrible system of torture and surveillance he upheld as his tenets and dogma. He gave a short, hard laugh as he replied :

“ I cannot compliment you, Count Mellikoff, on either section of your system. To me, as I said before, you all appear to act only as special police spies, each one ready and eager to betray the other should occasion arise, and each knowing the other to hold this power over him. You have interested me deeply ; but, pardon me, I cannot jump with you the entire length of the Tsar’s fatherly protection, as exemplified by the Imperial Chancellerie. I have an old-fashioned prejudice in favour of individual free will and independence.”

Count Mellikoff made a slight bow, and the smile on his lips deepened as he answered :

“ At least, sir, you will pay us this justice,

you never hear one Russian speak evil of another (I speak, of course, only of those of a certain social standing), nor will our ambassadors give any direct information to foreigners concerning any fugitive from justice, no matter how doubtful and suspicious their actions may appear. With us, sir, loyalty to our great Tsar and to his Government go hand-in-hand with our lives."

Mr. Tremain replied only by a gesture of assent, for, as he began to speak, George Newbold came up to him once more, and carried him off, with a hurried apology to the Count.

"We want him, you see. Many pardons, but he is needed for rehearsal. I'll be back directly," and Philip, thus hustled away, had no time to explain.

Count Vladimir Mellikoff stood very still for some moments after Philip left him; the lines of care and thought that were graven innumera- bly about his eyes and the corners

of his mouth, came forth with startling prominence, and gave a crafty, sceptical look to his countenance ; his eyes gleamed in their hollow sockets, his lips moved quickly, and then, with a sudden upward gesture of his right hand, he put back the note-book in his pocket, and, turning, walked slowly back to where he had left Patricia surrounded by her gay adorers.

The room, however, was empty now, and had Miss Hildreth been in very deed but a vision of his own creating she could not have vanished more completely—not a trace of her remained. The great carved chair in which she had sat was pushed hastily back, and about it, grouped in confusion, stood the ottomans, stools, *causeuses* and low *fauteuils*, in which her train of devotees had reposed themselves, all equally unoccupied now. Not a trace of the queen of the revels, or her light-hearted companions, remained—not one. Yet stay ; what is this lying on the floor, half-

hidden by the fallen satin cushion of her chair? This bit of finest muslin and filmy lace, dropped or forgotten by Patricia as she moved away indifferent, yet alive, to every note of praise or flattery that rang about her.

Count Mellikoff crossed the room with noiseless footsteps, bent down and picked up the dainty morsel; it proved to be a lady's handkerchief, and in the corner were an embroidered crest, and the initials *A. de L.* The Count gave one long-drawn sigh, almost a gasp, and then with dexterous fingers folded the delicate article neatly and placed it in an inner pocket of his waistcoat. He smiled as he did so, and said, half aloud :

“There's treason in every inch of that cambric and lace! Ah, madame, how we overreach ourselves sometimes, and how the odour of violets clings to every thread of this little traitor!”

Then he turned and walked down the

empty room, and as he reached the heavily-draped doors dividing the drawing-rooms from the music-hall, one of the curtains was pulled further aside, and he came face to face with Miss Rosalie James.

CHAPTER IX.

THE IMPERIAL CHANCELLERIE.

THREE months before that meeting between Patricia Hildreth and Mr. Tremain—out of which had grown such cynical disillusion on his part, and which had called forth such cogent reasons for his disenchantment—winter still held captive the great metropolis of Petersburg. But a winter of such dazzling brilliancy, such blue skies, such clear and glittering frost and snow, such floods of sunshine, such ringing out of joyful sleigh-bells, such flashing past of fair women robed *cap-à-pie* in costly furs, and such a constant round of gaiety and frivolity, as to rob the ice-king of his usual hardships and terrors.

Looking on as an unbiassed spectator at the life and vivacity of the scene, the riches and luxury displayed day by day on the Nevski Prospekts, at the line of handsome equipages, the brilliant uniforms of the Tsar's Guard Imperial, at the laughing eyes and fair faces of the fairest women of the world, at the hourly ebb and flow of the splendid pageant, who could believe, or, believing, realise that not a stone's-throw away, beneath the horrible gloomy walls of Peter's fortress, there languished men and women, equal in birth and position to those gay *flâneurs* of the present hour, and who once had flaunted their colours as bravely as the best, but who now, owing to the inexorable will of an acknowledged tyrant, wore their hearts away in imprisonment for some political lapse, some inadvertent dereliction, no matter how slight; perhaps but a word whispered in a lover's ear, a note given or taken, an uncontrolled exclamation, a gesture of emotion; and who, victims of that despotic secret police, betrayed, maybe, by

their nearest and dearest, were hurled in one moment from comparative security and protection into the terrible, silent, unapproachable dungeons of Petropavlovsk, from which no word or sigh, no cry for help, no appeal for justice ever resounds, and into which no whisper of comfort or encouragement, no sign of love, friendship, or remembrance, ever penetrates, whose only outlook is the still more horrible sentence of exile to Siberia, or perhaps a merciful deliverance through death on the weary march thither?

The very air of the gay city breathes disaffection and suspicion, while upon the brightest countenance, beneath the merriest jest and laugh, one reads the fleeting look of terror, or hears the echo of strained anxiety.

It was of Venice that Lord Byron wrote his famous line :

“A palace and a prison on each hand.”

And yet, surely, it may well be typical of

great Petersburg, where fair, and grand, and imperial rises the Winter Palace, guarded night and day by ranks of soldiers and police, within which reign luxury, power, and wealth, though stalked by the grim shadows of treachery, deception, Nihilism; while hard by, the frowning bastions of Peter and Paul tell of the first Peter's cruel tyranny, as of the latter-day hand of iron despotism and oppression; within whose death-encircling walls languish many of Russia's proudest sons and daughters, who, grown hopeless from long and fruitless waiting for deliverance, have become

“ . . . Bowed and bent,
Wax gray, and ghostly, withering ere their time.”

Thus does history but repeat itself, and the story of *Ivan Ivanowich* is rehearsed again and again, only the actors changing, not the drama, or the *mise-en-scène*.

On one bright and beautiful morning in January, when all the fashionable world of the famous capital were out and abroad, and

to all outward seeming "youth was at the prow, pleasure at the helm" of the day's amusements, a group of some half-dozen men were gathered together in a small inner apartment of the building known as the Imperial Chancellerie. Of these, some were in the police uniform of the Tsar, the others in plain morning dress, in one case enhanced by a great-coat lined with almost priceless sables. Conversation, which had been carried on in low tones, languished somewhat, and the only sounds that broke the increasing silence, were the scratching of a quill-pen over rough paper, or the fall of a coal from time to time from the open fireplace. It was the owner of the fur-lined great-coat who was writing, and as he sat busy and preoccupied, the clear, searching sunlight fell full upon him, and revealed a face of more than usual distinction. The brow was broad at the temples, growing narrow as it reached the hair that fell heavily across it, and which was well streaked with grey; the eyes were

intensely black, deep set in cavernous sockets, out of which they flashed and glowed like smouldering fires; the cheeks were thin, the complexion olive; a slight, short beard and moustache accentuated the pointed chin and firm, thin lips; the hand that guided the pen was slender, nervous, long-fingered, and capable.

In a word, the man writing in the inner sanctum of the Petersburg Chancellerie, and the man paying his *devoirs* to Patricia Hildreth, and conversing amicably with Mr. Tremain, are one and the same, Count Vladimir Mellikoff. It was easy to see that he was the ruling spirit of the group assembled, each one of whom treated him with deference and respect.

The quill-pen continued its noisy progress over the official paper for some moments, and the silence grew so intense that the tinkling of the sleigh-bells and the echoed laughter of the occupants of the droschkies as they flew past could be distinctly heard,

despite the heavy double casements. At length the door opened and another person entered, at sight of whom the assembled men fell into attitudes of anxious respect, even Count Mellikoff rising from the table and bowing deferentially to him.

The new-comer was a tall and handsome man, with a stern, uncompromising face, and of alert and dictatorial manner. He was dressed in morning attire, and wore on his coat more than one ribbon of merit or distinction. He advanced rapidly, bowing comprehensively, and took the chair offered him by Count Mellikoff, from which the latter had just arisen, with a courteous word and gesture.

This personage, for he well deserves the grander designation, was Paul Patouchki, a naturalised Russian, who owned Poland as his mother, yet yielded his allegiance to the Tsar; he was the head and chief in Petersburg of that secret section of the

Chancellerie whose work it was to keep strict watch and ward over the Imperial subjects, who, from business or pleasure, elected to live without the Tzar's boundaries. Patouchki was trusted implicitly by his superiors, whom, indeed, he had often served at the risk of his life, and by them, the Emperor of all the Russias not excepted, he was entrusted with the organisation and development of the most delicate missions ; for by no harsher word were the despotic actions and orders of the Chancellerie ever designated.

Patouchki seated himself and drew towards him a heavily brass-bound despatch-box, and unlocking it with a key suspended from his watch-chain, took from it his morning's correspondence ; this he scrutinised rapidly, sorting out the more important papers, and pushing the largest number towards a fair, boyish-looking young man, who had entered with him, with a muttered, "For you, Ivor," and then opening and reading

with quick and comprehensive eyes the few special communications he had reserved for his own perusal.

Indeed, every movement and action of this remarkable man bespoke a character of keen perceptions, unbending will, inflexible opinions, and quick deductions. As he finished his letters he folded them neatly and laid them down with nice precision, in due regularity of sequence of importance ; this done, he leant back and looked up at the men who stood somewhat back from him in the same respectful attitudes. This slight movement was evidently a signal well known, for each one of the group now advanced in turn and laid before Patouchki their reports, which were in the form of sealed documents ; then falling back again, waited for the chief to speak.

When he did so, his voice was harsh and crisp, the words fell from his lips with the precision of bullets from a repeating revolver, and it was noticeable that, whatever the

bearing or meaning of his instructions, his countenance and expression never changed or softened; that hard, imperious, unsympathetic human mask was never known to show emotion of any kind.

“Count Vladimir,” he said, addressing the most distinguished of the group, after himself, “I have read and considered your report of the work done by you in western France, which, I am requested by his Excellency to say, does you infinite credit; it has been decided by the secret committee of the Chancellerie to give into your hands a somewhat delicate mission. What say you, sir, to an expedition into the heart of Africa?”

“His Excellency knows he has but to command me at all times, and in any mission,” replied Count Mellikoff, his musical voice sounding in marked contrast to the other’s harsh tones; “my life is at the service of our father the Tsar.”

“Well said,” replied Patouchki, shortly; then, turning towards the others, he con-

tinued: "Gentlemen, we will dispense with your presence; we wish you good morning, sirs."

The salutation was a command, and so understood by those to whom it was addressed; they responded to it by bowing and withdrawing in silence; all but Ivor, who, as the chief's private secretary, was a privileged person.

As the door closed on the last departing agent, Patouchki turned somewhat hastily towards Count Mellikoff, and bade him be seated. Ivor Tolskoi's fair head was bent in studious attention over his official papers, and the chief had learned by experience that Ivor, despite his boyish face and girlish complexion, was both deaf, dumb, and blind when it behoved him to be so in the service of his master, even as his soft dimpled hand could, when occasion required, sheath itself in a gauntlet of iron, and deal a giant's blow.

"Vladimir Mellikoff," said the chief,

dropping the more ceremonious title, "we have tried your metal often, and know of what true steel it is fashioned; but the mission I am now desired to commit to your skill and judgment is one requiring even more *finesse*, delicacy, and determination than any that have gone before. Let me put well before you its hazards and unpleasant features, that you may withdraw your acquiescence, if you so desire."

Count Mellikoff, whose mobile face had responded by varying expressions to Patouchki's warning, now flushed suddenly, and as suddenly paled again; he leant forward impetuously, and spoke rapidly, the nervous fingers of his right hand moving restlessly as he did so.

"In what have I failed, chief, that you should think such words necessary?"

"In nothing, Vladimir Mellikoff," replied the other, coldly and without change of expression or voice; "we have ever found you ready and willing and zealous in our service; indeed, but one reproach can be attributed

to you, and that is more an attribute of temperament than a fault; *trop de zèle*, Vladimir, *trop de zèle*, has ruined more than one diplomat, and frustrated more than one mission."

Count Vladimir drew back as if struck an unexpected blow; his eyes flashed for a moment intemperately, the lines about his mouth tightened; then the habitual and tutored reserve and control of long apprenticeship reasserted itself, and when he bowed in answer to the implied reproof, his face was as expressionless and cold as that of his monitor. Patouchki continued:

"It goes without the saying that your mission will not take you into Africa, that was but a *pour-parler*; indeed, you must leave the East behind you and travel westward to the great continent of America; your work lies there, and if I mistake not, within the somewhat narrow limits of New York. You have read the minutes of the murder of Count Stevan Lalloovich, and you

know that our suspicions regarding the murderer all point to a woman, either as instigator or accomplice. *You* must find that woman, Vladimir. Stop," raising his hand imperatively, "we ask no impossible *devoir*; you shall have every facility afforded you, and as the case now stands, you will want no deadlier weapons than tact, *finesse*, and delicacy, the surest tools with which to meet a woman, since they are essentially her own."

"It is but a poor warfare, chief," replied the Count, a smile curving his lips in disdain.

Patouchki frowned.

"No warfare is poor or trivial, Count Vladimir, that sustains the safety of our father the Tsar, or that strengthens the hands of his Government. Women have proved ere now our most dangerous foes; they strike in the dark, and pay no regard to honourable codes. Since, then, we may not fight them openly, let us turn their own forces of cunning, artifice, and false-

hood against them. He who would serve the interests of the Tsar must put aside all considerations of sex."

Again Count Mellikoff bowed; and after a moment's silence the chief continued:

"You know the incidents of the murder, Vladimir, no need to recapitulate them; you know Count Stevan's near kinship to the Tsar, and the consequent lesson that must be read to all miscreants who think to spill the Imperial blood of Russia and escape unpunished. You know also of the oath sworn by that wretched woman, when, by Imperial ukase, her marriage to Stevan Lalloovich was pronounced void; you know her subsequent career, and the chain of circumstantial evidence that points to her as at least an accessory to the crime. We have reason to believe that she has escaped to America, and is living there in disguise; the chain has narrowed its links until we can confine ourselves to one state and one city of that great country—

New York, or a narrow radius therefrom. But so far the Chancellerie has been unable to lay the finger of certainty upon her, so far she has eluded our absolute knowledge ; and therefore it is to you we would depute the task of tracking her, dogging her, and bringing her personally within the power and jurisdiction of the Imperial Chancellerie. Are you willing to accept this work, Vladimir ? Remember, we ask it in the service of the Tsar, to whose protection you have hitherto, with undeviating fidelity, sworn to be true, even at the cost of your life."

Count Mellikoff, as Patouchki concluded, rose from his chair and walked quickly across the room to the window. As he did so, Ivor Tolskoi raised his fair head and youthful face, and looked after him. "Does he hesitate ?" he said within himself. "By our Lady of Kazan, I wish the chance were but offered me. The chief should find me ready, and as adamant against the softest lures of the fairest woman of all her sex." Then

he dropped his innocent blue eyes, and continued the monotonous pen-work on which he was engaged.

Vladimir Mellikoff remained for several long moments beside the window, looking out with unseeing eyes upon the well-known scene before him; upon the gaily decorated sleighs and droschkies flying by; upon the frozen Neva, over whose glittering ice the skaters were deftly circling; upon the Austrian band playing before the Admiralty, their light-blue uniforms seeming like a bit of the sky above, fallen to earth; upon the huge Imperial Winter Palace, whose innumerable windows glanced like jewels in the crisp cold sunlight; upon the officers and sentinels relieving guard at its gates; upon the throng of brightly attired pedestrians coming and going, up and down the broad streets, in quick succession; he knew it all so well, had been part of it for so many years. Was not this very scene photographed upon his brain's camera, with

all the high lights accentuated, and all the shadows deepened? Who shall say what wave of memory swept over him, as he stood there gazing down, seeing, yet not seeing the ever-changing panorama that since his boyhood had been dear to him; from the unique charm with which only youth and youth's memories can embellish the most ordinary scene?

Did he hesitate, or draw back from this mission laid upon him; did his heart and soul shrink from hounding out a woman, whose wrongs and griefs had hurried her on to the perpetration of a crime, which even he felt to be but an outburst of that savage justice that reigns deep down in every human heart? Did he confess to himself that it was but coward's work to bring to bear upon this wretched fugitive all the political force of the Imperial Chancellerie, with himself at its head as its willing and revengeful agent?

He knew well that if he undertook this

mission he would carry it through to the very end, that was his nature ; combining something of the sleuth-hound and the bulldog, he could track his prey indefatigably, and could fasten his cruel fangs upon it relentlessly when found. But was it worth his while, was the game noble enough ; was not fighting a woman, with her own weapons, but poor sport for one who had won his spurs in signal service under far braver and more dangerous circumstances ?

As he stood thus, wavering within himself, a hoarse and mighty shout went echoing up to the blue vaulted sky ; then came the clank of arms, the rattle of metal trappings, and a mounted guard swept into sight, their scarlet kaftans brilliant against the snow, the precursors of the Imperial equipage, in which, as it dashed past, Vladimir recognised the Tsar and Tsarina, enveloped though they were in robes and mantles of rarest furs. Behind them came another sleigh in which sat two ladies and an equerry ; as they

passed the Chancellerie, the lady nearest Vladimir's window lifted her face and turned it towards the grim walls; it was a pale and beautiful face, enhanced by the rich cap of sables that seemed to embrace lovingly the waves and masses of golden brown hair beneath it. As Count Vladimir caught sight of that proud, fair countenance, a sudden smile broke over it, called forth by some remark of her companion's, and melted all the pure still lines into the tenderest curves of youth.

It was but an instant. Then the sleigh had passed by, and was already far down the Nevski Prospekts, while the shouts and cries of "Long live the Tsar! Long live the Little Father!" grew fainter and fainter as the crowd followed in the wake of the Imperial *cortège*.

Count Vladimir started as from a reverie, and unconsciously drew up his tall figure proudly, while his face became haughty and resolved. Well he knew that fair, proud woman, and long had he served her as the

most ardent and loving of her slaves. She had been a hard task-mistress, but he loved her, and to win her would gladly have sold his soul to the Prince of Darkness. She had given him some half-encouragement when last he urged his suit, and laughing half tenderly as she dismissed him, bade him bring her yet one more proof of his undeviating fidelity to the Tsar, augment by one more public expression his unqualified loyalty, add one more ribbon to those he already wore on State occasions, and then—why, then, she, Olga the beautiful, the Tsarina's favourite, most beloved and loving maid of honour, Olga the cold, the proud, the unbending, would consider his passionate pleadings, his long service, and perhaps reward it in the way he implored.

“You must hesitate at nothing, Count Vladimir,” she had ended, “if it is to serve our father the Tsar. Remember, it is in small actions, rather than in great ones, that we prove our loyalty. Nothing can be too trivial or too heroic if it be undertaken for him.”

And Vladimir had gone from her presence resolved to win her at any cost. Here then, lay his opportunity close to his hand. He turned abruptly from the window, and met Ivor Tolskoi's eager blue eyes with such an expression of determination and pride that that youth dropped his abashed, and felt his chances of superseding Count Mellikoff to be but vain and delusive hopes.

"Your pardon, chief," said Vladimir, in a quiet voice, once more taking the chair facing Patouchki; "I have taken, perhaps, too much time to consider the flattering mission his Excellency would honour me with. My answer is, as it ever has been, and ever will be, that I am at the disposal of my gracious father the Tsar. My life is his, consequently what his Government elect for me to do, I can but consider as an Imperial command, and consecrate myself to its fulfilment. I am ready to leave Petersburg at a moment's notice."

"It is well said, Vladimir," replied Patouchki, over whose composed features

passed the faintest suspicion of relief. "My instructions are that you leave within the week ; to-morrow your papers of detail will be given you. I need not remind so faithful a servant of the Tsar that secrecy, despatch, and caution should be your watchwords. Be discreet, Vladimir, and watchful. Remember how much depends upon our having this woman within our power ; and remember, also, that in choosing you as their emissary, the secret committee have had particular regard to the exigencies of the case, and to the fact that you will have to deal with people of the upper classes, and through them work your way to the completion of the chain of evidence. Distrust every one, Vladimir ; but, above all, distrust the ladies of the great world, they are our cleverest enemies, even as they are our best friends. Your letters of introduction and credit will be sent you in due course. And now, good-bye, Vladimir, for the present. You have carried good luck with you so far, may it not fail you now."

A week later saw Count Vladimir Mellikoff on his way to Paris, *en route* for the United States, and as he settled himself comfortably in the *salon coupé* reserved for him in the *train de luxe* going southward, it was with the memory of Olga's blue eyes looking kindly on him, and Olga's hand resting just a moment longer in his than was necessary for good-bye, and his heart was warm within him, and he smiled as he watched the outlines of magnificent Petersburg fading in the distance.

His glance lingered longest on the glittering spire of Petropavlovsk, as it rose above the Neva, and when at last this was lost in the distance, he murmured, with a sigh upon his lips:

"Fate is stronger than conscience. I go to make war upon a woman, with a woman's smile as my reward!"

CHAPTER X.

A COURT FAVOURITE.

It was evening in the Winter Palace—evening of the day on which Vladimir Mellikoff had entered on the first stage of his new mission : to make war upon a woman.

Within the Palace all was hushed and still; the servants passed to and fro with noiseless footsteps and that well-trained air of repose only attainable by long and constant effort. For once no official or social entertainment was on hand, and the Imperial Family were enjoying the novelty of a comparatively quiet evening—a novelty, whose rarity precluded any possibility of its charm waxing dim.

The great State apartments, the Onyx Hall, and the *Salle des Palmiers* were empty, dark, and silent, hiding their wonderful treasures in the gloom and shadows: their priceless tables of malachite and lapis-lazuli; their jewel-encrusted frames to pictures rarer and more valuable than the gems that surrounded them. From out the dark corners started a thousand and one memories of by-gone kings and dynasties—of that great and licentious Catherine II., to whose energy Petersburg owes so much, and the Winter Palace its existence; of Peter, also called the Great, who first raised his nation from out of its barbarism; of Napoleon, and his restless ambition; of Nicholas, who died broken-hearted when Sevastopol fell; of Alexander, the wise and beneficent, father of the Tsar who now occupies the Imperial throne, and who strove in vain to stem the current of mad republicanism that spread disaffection broadcast from the Baltic to the Caspian, and which gathering strength year by year and

month by month, rolled on like some gigantic wave far out at sea, tossing high above the surrounding breakers, riding fearlessly to its doom, and breaking with devastating effect against the ill-protected breakwaters of monarchical institutions and traditions.

When the Court was alone, so to speak, and free from the onerous duties of perfunctory ceremonial, the Tsarina — whose nature was as gentle and loving and peaceful as that of her sister, the beloved Princess of England's hopes — shunned the vast State chambers, and held her *petites réunions* in a smaller suite of apartments, within which were gathered every luxury of modern civilisation, and where, when the heavy plush *portières* were drawn, the great stoves emitting the heat of a furnace, and the logs piled high on the low fire-dogs, it was possible to forget the ice and snow without, even as in looking upon the various spoils and souvenirs of every clime and country, from the rich silks and perfumed woods of the

Orient, to the more homely comforts of Great Britain, it was possible to forget that this was Petersburg, and become oblivious to those frowning walls and cruel dungeons, mocked by the names of the two Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul.

Nevertheless, there they stood, grim, real, dauntless, and within them languished the poor "prisoners of hope," wrapped, at least let us pray, in that merciful and dreamless sleep, which the dark hours bring even to the most miserable.

This favourite set of rooms of the Tsarina's opened one from another, each growing smaller until the last was reached, which was indeed a veritable nest of down for the fair Danish dove who had mated with the bold Russian eagle. Here the Empress received her most privileged guests, and permitted audiences that were of a peculiarly private or domestic order. Here, too, would come the Tsar, and throwing himself down into one of the low velvet ottomans, put from him his habitual

air of reserve and anxiety, and enter with affectionate raillery into the spirit of the hour; or should such be his mood, at a sign all would withdraw, leaving him alone with the Empress, who at such times threw aside the conventionalities of a life hedged in by etiquette, and became only the loving, faithful wife, the intelligent companion, the cheerful counsellor and consoler.

Much indeed might the walls of that blue chamber have revealed could they have spoken: secrets on which hung the fate of nations; decisions that were to make history; and confidences that wrung tears of blood from the stern Tsar, whose heart, like that of his father, loved his mighty empire, but who, unlike him, failed to inspire complete trust in his nation's heart.

On these occasions, the larger room of all was given up to the use of the Court; and here gathered the different ladies and gentlemen attached to the *personnel* of their Imperial Majesties; and here, too, were often admitted

particular friends of the bedchamber ladies, the maids of honour, the equerries, and other official personages of the Court. The orders, however, for such entrance were somewhat difficult to obtain, and each person who entered was keenly watched by a member of the secret committee of the Chancellerie, whose function, unknown to any but himself, obtained for him the fullest opportunities of scrutiny.

And in this incognito lay the power of the Chancellerie; for it might be the very individual to whom you spoke so confidently; the friend, man or woman, on whose fidelity you relied implicitly, the young girl with the innocent face, the youth with the bold free carriage, the elderly courtier with venerable grey locks, or the *dame d'honneur* of highest repute, who was the secret agent and in the secret pay of the Chancellerie, and who, at a given signal, would deliver you up to its iron laws, its fearless judgments, and cruel sentence.

On this particular evening the outer *salon* was well filled with guests, whose gay voices and subdued rippling laughter mingled with the strains of the Household band, and bespoke some hearts at least among the number as free from carking care. French was the language spoken, for Petersburg outvies even gay Lutetia itself in its undeviating worship of all things Parisian.

Within an embrasure of one of the heavily-draped windows, the curtains of which had been pulled somewhat hastily apart, sat a youthful couple, who would in any assembly have stood boldly forth as being more beautiful and distinguished than is the usual type of humanity. Of these, one was a young man, the other a woman scarcely entering her second decade, but with so much of imperious grandeur and haughty pride of race about her that to call her by the less dignified title of girl or maiden would seem an impertinence.

The young man was of more than ordinary proportions, tall and broad-shouldered, with a

look of the innocence of childhood still clinging to the soft curves of his fair Northern face, that was revealed in his joyous azure-blue eyes, and reflected in the crisp golden curls which, despite the rigid cropping according to the last Paris mode, lay in tiny rings all over his round and well-shaped head. A close observer would perhaps have noted that his throat, though full and well developed, owned a straight and clean back line, denoting a lack of amative passion, and that the head and forehead were most developed where the phrenologists tell us to look for cruelty and perseverance. His hands were remarkably white, and kept in scrupulous order, even to the finely-rounded filbert nails that shone with the reflected sheen of a *polissoire* and *poudre des ongles*. This was his only bit of coxcombry, however, and for the rest, it may be said, he had a hearty laugh, a merry jest, and a cheerful word for every one, and, while boasting more friends than any young patrician in Petersburg, yet admitted no one to a

closer intimacy than that accorded by outward cordiality of manner.

This was Ivor Tolskoi. We have seen him before, in the inner sanctum of the Chancellerie, when Vladimir Mellikoff accepted his mission ; and Ivor cursed the fate that trembling in the balance, fell in the favour of the older and more experienced man, and thus shut him out from winning his first spurs in the service of his master.

Ivor Tolskoi was, in many ways, an *enfant gâté* of his world. He was an orphan, and very rich ; a ward of the Tsar's, owning large estates in the wild Ural province, which he seldom visited, and serfs whose numbers he had never counted, who were free in name only, and whose sole use in the world was so to labour for him that his revenues year by year never failed, and never grew less. He owned no title, and he would have scorned the acceptance of any mere bauble of to-day's creation ; he would have told you, with a toss

of his golden head and a ringing laugh, that the Tolskois were lords of the soil and of human souls long centuries before Peter came to the Imperial throne, and raised his nation from out their barbaric indolence ; and that while the imperious Tsar was learning ship-building at Deptford, his ancestor of that period was riding at large over his vast properties, hunting the wild boar and the wolf, the ermine and marten, across his own territory, whose boundaries not even he could define. It would ill become him, then, the last scion of his grand old race, to accept a tawdry title in place of his own simple name, Ivor Tolskoi, which each eldest son had born in succession for generation after generation, and before which the peasants upon his wide western property turned pale and trembled.

His companion was his equal in feminine beauty, and there were many circumstances in the life of each strangely similar, which served to draw them closer together, and

more intimately than is usually the case in a country and a Court where etiquette governs rather than affinity.

The face of the young woman who leant back negligently against the pile of velvet cushions Ivor had placed for her, was strangely beautiful, with the weird, almost unholy beauty of an enchantress of old; such beauty as Faustine wore, or Cleopatra, or Messalina, which enslaves the senses at once, without leaving any loophole for calm reason. She too was tall and grand of build, though slight, as became her three-and-twenty years; her shoulders bore the curves of the Milo Venus; her neck and bosom fell in the round charming lines of maidenhood; her head rose proudly from the short classic pillar of her throat, and was carried with an almost royal grace; the sweep from chin to ear was perfect in its fine symmetry; the low arched forehead bespoke more than ordinary intelligence; beneath it her eyes, set wide apart and wearing a look

of innocent fearlessness, were of the deepest shade of violet, to which the black lashes and pencilled brows gave the piquancy of unexpectedness, for her hair, which was rolled high in heavy masses and fastened with a jewelled arrow, was brown in colour, shot through with a thousand lights of golden auburn; her complexion was pale but warm, and the small perfectly modelled bow of her mouth was tinged with vivid crimson, adding the perfecting note to her ideal countenance.

In manner she was cold, proud, repellent, though beneath the outward ice ran a fire of passion that once let loose would sweep away all barriers of conventionality, and stop at nothing to accomplish its desires.

Like Ivor, she was an orphan, and like him untitled, but there ran within her veins a strain of the great Catherine's blood, transmuted to her from an ancestor who could boast of Imperial favours, and of this bar sinister in the past Olga—for she it was—was prouder than of any patent of a lesser

nobility. It may be that, generations intervening notwithstanding, this last fair representative of her race possessed some traits and characteristics of her Imperial ancestress, for like her, she was both strong and weak, impetuous and calculating, passionate and mercenary, forgiving and tyrannical ; and was indeed a pure specimen of the Russian type, in which are so strongly and so dispassionately blended the master passions of cruelty and remorse.

Olga Naundorff had known no home save that of the Court, for though she inherited a fair property from her father, it was situated many long miles from Petersburg, on the southern frontier amidst the trackless wastes of the steppes, where for nine months continual snow reigned, and where the long dreariness of winter was fraught with the terror of isolation and dull monotony.

Olga remembered but little of this far-away home, and shunned such memories whenever they came to her, with an instinc-

tive shrinking from the unknown and undesirable.

Her father, who had been a brave and gallant officer, who had served his country on many a battle-field, and loved his Tsar, the Alexander of good deeds, with a strong and fervent love, which nothing, not even the claims of his little daughter, could outweigh, and who was trusted and loved in return by his Emperor, brought the little motherless Olga, when but a child of ten, to Gatschina, presented her to the Tsar, demanding an asylum for the pretty child, whose mother was dead, and whose fearlessness and beauty made her the more open to an untoward fate.

The great Alexander was pleased to gratify his faithful friend and servant, and was also captivated by the tiny maid's rare loveliness; and so it came about that General Naundorff's desire was granted, and his little Olga became the pet and plaything of the Imperial Court. There she grew from girlhood to maidenhood,

and, as her beauty developed more and more, and her intelligence expanded, she became a special favourite with the Tsar, to whose private apartments she had free access, and from whom she gained by her pretty imperious pleading, many a coveted favour for some loyal subject of his Majesty.

The news came of her father's death, but it made little difference to Olga; she had scarcely known him, she could not be expected to weep for one she did not love. Her first real sorrow fell upon her when by the hand of an assassin, the kind and gracious Alexander II. passed from life to death. Her grief was inconsolable then; she wept for days and nights, and mourned him with a deep abiding sorrow, that fostered and strengthened her hate and abhorrence of those who, while calling themselves Russians and patriots, planned secretly, and in the dark, for the overthrow of the Imperial throne.

She was grown a woman then, and a rarely beautiful one, with her fair proud

face with its touch of royal scorn, and her free, upright, graceful form. It was at this time that Vladimir Mellikoff first saw her, and claiming distant cousinship, proceeded straightway to fall in love with her and worship her; a worship she accepted as a right, but a love which she only tolerated with indifference.

When the new Tsarina formed her personal Court, she named Olga as maid of honour, and when first the young girl entered on her duties, received her with such winning sweetness and graciousness, as to subdue utterly the proud heart, and cause it to transfer to the young and still lovely woman all its treasure of intense veneration, affection, and allegiance which it had held for the beloved Alexander.

Count Mellikoff, meantime, succeeded but poorly in his suit; Olga was neither touched nor won by his persistency; she accepted his homage and his passionate devotion with her superb Imperial grace, but granted

him nothing in return, save perhaps when she saw him wavering and uncertain, torn between his love and his self-respect, then she would bestow on him a smile of dazzling softness, or let her slim firm fingers rest a moment within his, or murmur some half inaudible word of praise or protest, when he would be again at her feet, her slave, her adorer, her passionate lover.

He had spoken out his love at last, and urged his claims upon her so vehemently and with such emotional force, as to rouse her even from her habitual indifference, and to call forth that half promise, on account of which Vladimir had started on his new mission with such an exulting heart and such visions of glorified future bliss.

There was one *habitué* of the Court, however, whom Olga often favoured with her rare smiles, and in whose company she always appeared frankly content; this was Ivor Tolskoi, in whose fair good looks she took honest pride, and for whom she

laid aside something of her haughty, imperious manner. Indeed, Ivor was so bright and joyous, such an incarnation of the brilliant sparkling cold sun of Petersburg, which exhilarates but does not warm, it was impossible not to like him, and not to melt under the cool fire of his blue eyes, and the fine if cruel smile of his lips ; only Olga failed to see the coldness or the cruelty.

She fancied she knew Ivor Tolskoi's life from Alpha to Omega, that there was not a page of his daily existence that was not open to her inspection, and yet she in reality knew nothing ; not even his daily avocations, beyond the light ones imposed upon him by Court regulations, and never dreamed that he was one of the most vigilant and most active members in the secret service of the Chancellerie. Indeed, Ivor Tolskoi's boyish face and youthful laugh seemed incompatible with intrigue and surveillance ; and Ivor knew this, and

took good care to play both his rôles with diplomatic *finesse* and success.

“And so, Ivor,” Olga was saying in her clear, cold voice, “you really believe that that wretched woman of the *bourgeoisie* had a hand in the murder of poor Stevan Lalloovich? Upon my word, to what heights will the *canaille* next aspire, if even a Prince of Russia is not safe from the stab of a knife in the hand of a red republican? Do you think she murdered him, Ivor?”

“Ah,” replied Tolskoi, “you put a blunt question, Mdlle. Naundorff,” for though Olga addressed him with the familiarity of a sister, Ivor never so far forgot himself as to reply in like manner. “How dare one express any opinion on any subject in these days of treachery, since the very walls have ears and the very doors speak? And even should you press me, mademoiselle, I could not answer; I never have any opinion on any subject more important than a ball cotillon; *c’est trop de peine*.” And Ivor

threw back his head and laughed, his full and hearty peal, at sound of which several of the other guests of the *salon* stopped their idle occupations and laughed in sympathy. But Olga frowned and beat her pointed slipper impatiently against the foot-stool on which it rested.

"Don't be silly, Ivor," she said; "and don't laugh so loud, you will have old Madame Bettcheriski down upon us for breach of etiquette. When will you cease to be such a boy?"

"When I cease to sun myself in your smiles, mademoiselle," replied the young man, gallantly, and with a half-mocking bow. "When that unhappy day dawns for me I shall take leave of my youth for ever, and seeing it fall from me, grow as 'grave and reverend a signior' as Count Vladimir himself."

To this allusion to her absent lover, Olga made no rejoinder save by a scarcely perceptible upward movement of her head. She waited a moment before she spoke

again, and in the silence that fell between them, there floated across the room the conclusion of a sentence, spoken in a musical though rather high-pitched voice :

“It is true, nevertheless. She may not care for him, but when he returns to Court our proud and haughty favourite will be prepared to bestow her hand upon him.”

Then the speaker's voice faded away into space, and Olga looking up found Ivor's eyes fixed upon her with a strange and unwonted fierceness in their blue depths. Her own fell beneath his glance, and she felt with annoyance the blood rise in her face, and spread its crimson over her pale cheeks.

She was angry at this school-girl exhibition, and drew herself upright into a more dignified attitude, folding her hands on her knees, and looking up boldly into Ivor's face ; as she did so the colour faded as quickly as it had come, leaving her paler than before. Tolskoi continued to gaze at her intently ; he bent forward a little, bring-

ing his golden head nearer her dark one, and said, in a voice quite different from his usual gay *insouciant* tones :

“It is my turn to ask a question. Is this true, mademoiselle ?”

“Is what true ?” replied Olga, under her breath, half fascinated by the face and eyes looking down so close upon her ; a face that bore the familiar lineaments of Ivor, but with an expression she had never seen there before, and which made this very familiarity seem strange and repellent.

“Is it true,” repeated Ivor, in the same low voice, “that when Count Vladimir Mellikoff returns—if he returns—Mademoiselle Naundorff will bestow upon him the honour of her hand ? Is it true ? For that is the reading between the lines, is it not ? Our Court recognises but one proud favourite, mademoiselle, and who should know her name so well as you ? At present she lacks but one courtier in her train, Count Vladimir. You see the riddle is not difficult of solution ; but is it true—Olga ?”

It was the first time he had ever called her by her name, and Mademoiselle Naundorff winced perceptibly as she heard it fall from his lips, in the low suppressed tones of his voice. She started, and threw back her head with her favourite gesture, as if she would throw off the burden of the hour, and free herself from its restrictions.

“Have you a right to ask, Ivor?” she answered, coldly. “How can you be so foolish as to heed a bit of incomplete gossip, blown to us from the lips of Countess Vera, light as feather-down, and without beginning or end, as are most of the Countess’s scandals?”

“You may laugh at me if it pleases you,” replied the young man, brusquely; “but I will have my answer. Is it true?”

“*Will* have—and to me!” cried out Mademoiselle Naundorff, hasty anger in her voice, then laughing a little. “You deserve to be punished for your temerity. What—since you will have it so, Ivor—what if to oblige you I admit that perhaps when Count

Mellikoff returns, if I see my way to it, and am not too *bornée* or fatigued, I may—what is the happy phrase?—bestow my hand upon him. There, you have your answer, sir.”

She leant back again against the cushions, and scrutinised him through her half-closed eyelids. Ivor’s face was white with passion; his blue eyes seemed made of steel, so hard and brilliant was their lustre. He did not move from his position, or take his gaze from her face, and when he spoke it was with no outburst of anger or eloquence, but in the same repressed low voice.

“Then I warn you, Olga, let him take heed, for you shall never give to him what I know you would refuse to me. Should he dare to boast of you as won by him, I will make him eat his own words, even though it be with a knife of steel.”

Olga shuddered involuntarily, but controlling herself quickly, said quietly, with a little laugh: “You speak at random, my poor Ivor; what wish of yours have I dis-

regarded, or what request left unfulfilled? Is there anything more I can do for you?"

But Tolskoi was not to be put off with light words or meaningless phrases; his face did not relax, nor a softer expression come to his eyes, at her bantering words, though he spoke somewhat less harshly.

"Yes, you can give me one thing more; you can give me your promise never to marry Vladimir Mellikoff without my consent. Will you promise me this, Olga?"

Mdlle. Naundorff was now, however, thoroughly roused; she sprang to her feet and drew up her tall figure to its full height, while the proud lines of her face became prouder and more imperious, and her voice vibrated with suppressed anger, though her tones fell calm and cold.

"Certainly not, Monsieur Tolskoi; you presume too far on good fellowship. I make no promise to you, or any one, that shall control my free actions; what you ask is preposterous, Ivor, preposterous."

"Then I will kill him," said Tolskoi, quite calmly, and without any extraordinary vehemence in his voice or manner; "I will kill him."

And as Olga drew back, startled at his unexpected reply, he bent forward and caught her hand in his.

"Remember what I say, Olga; if he presumes to think that he has won you, or dares to say so, or if I learn in any way that you are his promised wife, I will kill him. He shall not possess what I would give my life to gain, and what you know would be refused me."

Then he dropped her hand, and before Olga could recover from her surprise, had passed down the long *salon*, and through the open *portières* into the great corridor that led to the palace court-yard.

Olga remained for some moments dazed and astonished, trying in vain to reconcile the Ivor of the past with the Ivor of the moment, wondering vaguely at his strange

words and altered aspect. She had known for some months that he made no secret of his devotion to her, but he had always urged his admiration upon her in such a happy half-bantering fashion, she only regarded it as a boy's ardour, nor took him more seriously than his youthful face and careless manner demanded.

He had, indeed, once hinted at a deeper feeling, but she had laughed and told him not to burn his fingers with fire, and he, after a moment's annoyance, had laughed with her, and returned to his old openly expressed adoration.

But now, within this last half-hour, she had seen below the surface of that gay exterior, and she drew back half-alarmed, half-fascinated at what she beheld there. And although she had had her eyes opened to the other side of Ivor's nature, she had ruled and controlled men too long, seen them become her willing and abject slaves at a mere smile or word too often,

to give much weight to Tolskoi's threat; it amused her rather than terrified her.

"Poor Ivor," she mused; "how very melodramatic, and how youthful! I must get you into better training, Ivor, or we shall have you really committing some foolish escapade, and mixing my name up in it, in a way I should not care for."

Then she turned from the window, and as she did so came her summons to the Empress, and hastening to obey the command she forgot Ivor entirely, or remembered him only to say half vexedly: "After all he told me nothing about Count Stevan's murder. Oh, tiresome Ivor!" And thus she dismissed him, and all other annoying subjects, with but scant courtesy.

CHAPTER XI.

A WOMAN SCORNE.

WHEN Count Vladimir Mellikoff drew back the *portières* that shrouded the doors of the large drawing-room at the Folly, he came face to face with Miss Rosalie James, and for a full moment these two gazed at each other in a silence that might have been born either of unexpectedness, or preconcerted arrangement.

Count Mellikoff never allowed ordinary emotions to be visible in his face; he had that absolute control of feature and muscle which only long training and an inflexible will can effect. It is seldom one comes across such a countenance, over which no ap-

preciable change ever passes, and upon which the passions leave no reflex, not even the slightest shadow, such as troubles a pool when a cloud passes overhead, that is gone even as one watches its approach. Such a countenance betokens one of two temperaments: a nature too weak and vacuous to feel or comprehend any master passion, and which from very inanition becomes irresponsible, or one so strong and so intense as to fear its own capabilities, and therefore strives to conceal all outward expression, lest its lightest emotion might exhibit something more than the usual conventionalities.

Of the latter type was Vladimir Mellikoff. From his boyhood he had taught himself the value of repression, and in it had found his greatest power. He had learned to so utterly subdue all outward expression of the passion that at the moment might be consuming him, as to remain absolutely passive under the most trying circumstances, and so to control his every feature, that not one

muscle, not so much as the trembling of his lips or the lifting of his eyebrows, ever betrayed him, when it was his will that they should not.

And yet, perhaps, the greatest charm that he possessed was the sudden and unexpected brilliancy or softness which he at times allowed his countenance to assume; then all the harsh, decisive lines faded from about his mouth and eyes, the stern rigidity of chin and brow relaxed, the gravity of the dark eyes, in their deep settings, grew tender, and the expression of melancholy harshness melted beneath the sweetness of his smile.

Olga Naundorff, who knew him so well, had seen this change in him more often than any one, yet even to her it was always new and startling, and filled her with a certain feeling of amazement, not unmingled with pity. For to Olga, the beautiful, as to her Imperial ancestress, men and men's passions were but playthings of the hour, and should, like all mechanical toys, be perfectly regulated

by ingenious clockwork, warranted never to get out of order, and never to carry their cleverness beyond certain boundaries. If any one of her puppets over-stepped these, and showed signs of unconventional or barbaric passion, she lifted her dark brows in astonishment, raised her proud head a trifle more haughtily, and with superb disdain reduced the poor bungler to his proper state of imbecility, and then passed him by ever after with an intensity of quiet scorn, that killed by slow but sure degrees.

To her mind all passion was vulgar, and to be vulgar was to write one's self down a fool; fools had no place in her world. They might be of use in some other part of the globe, that was not her affair; to her they were bores, and bores, as we all know, are obnoxious pests; away with them, let them be anathema. Life is too short to expend any portion of it on emotions that ruin the digestion and spoil the most perfect complexion.

For one entire moment Miss James and Count Vladimir looked full in one another's faces, and in that moment each pair of dark eyes read something in the other that caused them both to sink simultaneously, while over the girl's cheeks a faint dull red rose and faded.

The half smile, mocking yet satisfied, that had come to Count Mellikoff's lips as he picked up the bit of lace and muslin from beside Patricia's chair, still lingered, and now it deepened somewhat, as with a bow he stepped back, holding aside the heavy draperies, and by an almost imperceptible gesture commanded Miss James to enter. She obeyed him, and as the thick plush curtains fell behind her with a dull rustle, they seemed to her excited fancy to shut her out for ever from the gaiety and freedom of the life she had quitted only a moment ago, even as they shut her within the deserted drawing-room, with Vladimir Mellikoff as her only companion.

She laughed nervously and put her hand up to her throat as she did so, trying in vain to shake off the absurd superstitious feeling that was creeping over her, and that seemed to enfold all her senses and render her acquiescent and obedient to the will of this tall dark man, who stood before her, and whose distinguished face, with its burning eyes and compressed lips, fascinated her, as the serpent fascinates the dove. She could even think of this simile, and in her heart laugh at it, but she could not shake off, or overcome the fact of his mesmeric influence upon her.

Count Mellikoff drew a low *causeuse* towards her, and with grave politeness begged her to be seated. She sank down upon it with passive obedience, and folding her hands on her knees looked up at him; she held a *marquise* fan of ostrich plumes, these trembled somewhat; it was the only sign of emotion that escaped her.

Vladimir turned from her and walked the

length of the drawing-room, standing for a moment at the entrance to the conservatory, where lived the golden-hued Maréchal Niel roses; their pungent yet faint perfume permeating the atmosphere, while their heavy heads drooped with the burden of their own loveliness, half hidden in the tender green of their leaves.

As he walked away from her, Rosalie roused herself from the strange lethargy that had subdued her; she threw back her head, her breath came quickly, a flush crept up and stained the olive pallor of her cheeks; she opened her hands, throwing them out with an impatient gesture, and the *marquise* fan fell noiselessly at her feet, the waving feathers making a light breeze as they fluttered down that touched her face and lifted the laces of her low corsage.

The over-strained tension of her nerves gave way; she could have cried for very relief and joy as she felt the spell of his presence failing at the return of her powerful will.

She watched him eagerly and saw him enter the rose house ; as his dark figure vanished in the interior gloom she jumped up quickly, threw up her arms, and drew a long deep breath ; took a step or two forward, and noticing the fallen fan stooped to pick it up, then turned to leave the room by a side entrance. As she did so Vladimir Mellikoff stood before her, holding a golden-hued rose between his fingers.

She started back, she was almost terrified by his sudden reappearance ; she had not heard his approach, his footsteps were noiseless on the heavy carpet ; she imagined him safe in the alleys of the conservatory, and her escape from him but the effort of a moment. She had but stooped to recover her fan, and lo, there he stood, tall and commanding and smiling, before her. She gazed at him questioningly, and again, as her glance met his inscrutable dark eyes, she recalled the old fable of the serpent and the dove. She sank down upon the *causeuse* trembling.

“Mademoiselle,” Count Vladimir’s courteous, cool tones were saying, “will you honour me by the acceptance of this rose? The royal flower, *par excellence*, over all other flowers, as one of your own English writers, John Ruskin, says. If I may be permitted to suggest so bold an idea, it will enhance, and be enhanced, by a place in your corsage.”

He held out the flower, smiling as he did so, and she took it mechanically, and fastened it amidst the black laces that draped her shoulders and bosom; it dropped its golden head lovingly upon them, while its perfume rose and fell with the pulsations of her heart.

Vladimir drew a chair opposite to her and sat down, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, and his keen eyes noting each fluctuating expression of her face, each flutter of the laces above her unquiet breast, each nervous movement of her hands in their long, loose Suède coverings. He had a dangerous game to play, and upon his success

or defeat depended his winning or losing Olga. As her name crossed his mind, though not spoken by his lips, he was shaken by a sudden passion of love and desire ; he recalled her proud, pale beauty, the blue of her eyes, "blue as the violets of his own Novgorod," the golden sheen of her hair, her lissom figure, and her cold haughty smile.

He *would* win her, or he would die; and what mattered any other woman's life if he could but appear worthy in her eyes? What had the chief said? "You must use a woman's weapons—*finesse*, deceit, distrust—when you make war upon a woman." Well, and so he would; it should go hard with him if he could not fit himself out in a woman's armour, and not reveal where the breast-plate failed to meet, or the helmet bound his forehead too tightly. One must put up with such little inconveniences when one adapts oneself to the warfare of the weaker sex.

"Above all, distrust the women of the great world, they are our cleverest enemies ;" that

had been another of Patouchki's axioms; and he did distrust this pale, dark-eyed, slight American girl with every fibre of his mind, and read her through and through; her shallow cleverness, her dwarfed ambitions, her stunted love, that was not so much love as a mixture of baffled pride and jealousy, and desire of conquest. She could be useful to him; he had decided that within the dinner-hour, when he caught her suspicious glances, cast first at Philip Tremain, as he sat on Mrs. Newbold's left, and then at Miss Hildreth, who, radiant and handsome, was eating olives, and mystifying George Newbold, on whose right hand she was placed. He had read Miss James's secret then and there, and resolved that it should be useful to him, and that she should be the tool in his master-hand wherewith to work.

Rosalie in due course had been presented to him, and she had not failed to notice and feel flattered by his attentions to her. She was smarting under Mr. Tremain's too

apparent indifference, and Patricia's too evident power. She longed to strike both the one and the other, to tear off the masks from their serenely smiling faces, and hold them up to the scorn and derision of their world.

"I hate them both," she murmured between her teeth. "I hate him because he loves her still, and I hate her because she is so beautiful and so victorious. I know there is some secret well hidden behind that lovely face, and oh, what would I not give to find it out and reveal it!"

It was at this moment that George Newbold's lazy voice interrupted her thoughts, and looking up she saw him leaning towards her with the distinguished appearing foreigner beside him. Mr. Newbold mumbled out two names and left them, and Rosalie glancing up again met the Count's steady dark eyes fixed upon her, and knew with sudden certainty that he had read her face only too well; how much more that lay beneath

the surface of her outward seeming not even she could tell!

They stood quite silent for several moments, and during that time she felt imperceptibly at first, and then more and more certainly, his influence and power growing upon her; she acknowledged the intensity of his glance without daring to meet it, and could have cried for rage at her own inability to throw off the fascination he exercised over her. When he spoke it was upon a commonplace topic, and she drew a sigh of relief when, after a brief conversation, he bowed and left her, even though conscious of a vague regret that he should go from her.

During the evening she had many times felt his eyes seek her out and rest for a moment on her face, and at each such occurrence the blood had rushed to her cheeks, and she had trembled, though not with cold. He had stood a long time talking with Mr. Tremain, and she had watched them

with a half-formed anticipation of some coming and unexpected catastrophe, and then, when she turned and sought to leave the room, she heard a quiet voice say, "Permit me," the door was opened for her, and as she expressed her thanks Count Vladimir bowed, and returned to his place beside Philip. And now they were once more together and alone, and she was again conscious of an ever-increasing apprehension; the prescience of some coming evil in which they were both to bear a part, and yet which she was powerless to avert.

"Mademoiselle," said Count Vladimir, bending a little more forward and looking up at her from under his dark brows, "I am about to do something which under ordinary circumstances and with an ordinary audience would be considered not only indiscreet but unconventional. If I misjudge my opportunity and my audience and offend you by putting you outside the pale of weak worshippers of conventional cult, pray say so at

once, and I will humbly beg your pardon and withdraw."

For answer she drew her fingers once or twice across the feathers of her fan, and let her eyes travel slowly up from that pretty toy to his face, taking in as they did so the smallest detail of his appearance, from the thin long-fingered hands, that hung down so quietly between his knees, the dead gold of the one ring he wore with its blazing ruby, to the tiny red rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honour that decorated his correct evening costume. As she raised her eyes still higher they met his, and for an infinitesimal space of time held hers captive; then she dropped them again, and sinking back against the cushions of her chair, raised the feather fan until it rested against her lips. Her voice was quiet when she replied, though a fine ear might have caught a suspicion of fear in it:

"You flatter me, Count Mellikoff; to be considered above one's world in virtue or

in vice is always a distinction, if not always an honour. Pray in what indiscretion can I be of help to you?"

"I will tell you frankly, mademoiselle, that I am visiting this country for two purposes and in two characters. It has struck me that as one part of my work is that of reparation, a woman of my own world, of quick perceptions, nice judgment, and unerring instinct might, and could, materially assist me in my self-imposed task. I know the generosity of women, and I know how quick they are to respond to any tale of wrong or outrage; perhaps it is the very conventionalities of their lives which hedge them in, from birth to marriage, that increases their spontaneous desire to see wrongs righted, and the criminal brought to justice. I do not know, that is a question of analysis into which I cannot enter; I may have my theories, but need not bore you with them. The result of the present system is made plain to me by the women of my own country,

where no rule or restriction is ever relaxed on any pretence, and where the world and the world's dogmas are worshipped with a blind and absolute faith. And yet, *mademoiselle*, even there I have known the fairest and highest born women, when occasion required, shake off the chains of custom and stand forth boldly in defence of right and justice."

"That, Count Mellikoff, it seems to me any woman would do, no matter what her nationality, if the object of her enthusiasm was worthy in her eyes. It is not to an American girl that you should plead for liberty of thought and action, since we have grown up upon the very soil that once was baptized in blood, shed by our forefathers to gain this very freedom of opinion."

"It is a grand country," replied Vladimir, slowly, and without banter or sarcasm in his tone, "I admire it already, though as yet but a stranger, and it is for that very reason that I shrink from one part of my

task. Mademoiselle, when one has been courteously received, and hospitably entertained, one hesitates to strike a blow at those who have so trusted one. The Arabs read us a lesson in moral ethics, which we children of a latter-day civilisation would do well to follow. He who breaks bread with the child of the desert is ever after protected by him and his tribe. Not so with us, treachery is our watchword, ingratitude our pass key."

He spoke somewhat bitterly, though without changing his position or expression, and Miss James, as she looked searchingly at him, could discover no corresponding reflexion of words in face or eyes.

"Has your experience been of such a character?" she asked, a little abruptly.

"Both my experience and actions will bear me out in my asseverations," he replied; and then in rather a lighter tone he continued: "It is rather the fault of our nineteenth century progress, mademoiselle, that we

have neither time nor inclination for the old-fashioned courtesies and amenities of our grandsires' days ; we make boast of our honesty and truth, it is true, and we are brutal often in enforcing these virtues ; we cry out against and disclaim the gentler methods, and say with satisfied arrogance that fine phrases have no truth, polite aphorisms no depth ; well, perhaps we are right, but for my part I prefer a well-turned and politely-worded lie, knowing it to be such, than the brute force of to-day's truthfulness. Honesty and honour have such elastic definitions, it is difficult to know where the one degenerates into mendacity, or the other becomes contention.

“ Let us, however, leave useless analysis, mademoiselle, and with your permission, I will become personal. I am selfish in doing so, because I desire to interest you in myself and my work.”

He drew back a little as he spoke, and lifted his arms from his knees, bringing

his face more on a level with hers. Rosalie watched him with the same indefinable interest and fascination that had first subdued her. She did not speak, but her eyes sought his and rested there, and the heavy golden flower upon her bosom rose and sank hurriedly.

“Have I your permission, mademoiselle?” he asked.

She bowed her head, making an affirmative gesture with her hand; the feather fan lay still upon her lap.

“You have heard,” he began, “that I am here in two characters. I come in the ordinary way to visit a great country, for which my own land has always entertained a friendly feeling; I come to inspect her institutions, her educational universities, her great cities, her fine rivers; I come to admire and to learn, and to carry back with me pleasant recollections of a too-hospitable and charming people. That is I, in my proper aspect, without disguise or conceal-

ment; but that is not my first object, or my real errand. Mademoiselle, I come to seek, to trace, to find—a woman. One who has flown to your country for protection, to escape the penalty of crime; who is a fugitive from justice, and who thinks, poor fool! thus to avoid the power and the vengeance of Russia. Mademoiselle, it is in this work I ask your assistance.”

As he spoke, Miss James had risen to her feet, and now stood before him, her face blanched and haggard, her eyes glowing dark and angry, her breath coming quick and short; her arms hung straight down by her sides, the loose gloves falling about the thin wrists and leaving bare the slender arms; the feather fan lay unheeded at her feet.

“Why do you ask *me*, Count Mellikoff?” she cried, in a strained, harsh voice, her eyes never leaving his face. “Why do you ask me to help you to track a woman, to hunt a fugitive, a poor, wretched, heart-broken fugi-

tive, no doubt flying for her life from your cruel country and its cruel laws? What do you see in me that makes you think I will lend myself to your mad schemes? What am I that you should so count upon my co-operation?"

She stopped, and Vladimir, who had also risen and stood facing her, cool and unmoved, bent down and, lifting up the *marquise* fan, handed it to her with a bow before he replied. When he spoke his voice was keen and sharp, his words cutting and cruel.

"What do I see in you, mademoiselle? Nay, let me rather answer your question by a line from an English poet:

'I see—a woman scorned——'

How does the couplet end?"

But Miss James made him no reply, her hands closed vehemently on the fan she held; under their pressure the frail pearl sticks snapped in two and fell apart. She looked at him fixedly; the crimson blood had rushed

in a torrent to her face, and the red stain lingered there. Suddenly she faltered, trembled, swayed a little, and sinking down upon the low *causeuse*, covered her face with her hands and burst into long-drawn sobs and tears.

It was late that night before Miss James sought her own room; as she passed out of the drawing-room Count Vladimir held back the heavy *portières* with respectful attention, bending his head in salutation as she went by him.

Behind her, on the velvet carpet, lay the strewn petals of a golden-hued rose, about whose torn beauty a subtle fragrance still lingered, and the broken pearl sticks of a *marquise* feather fan.

CHAPTER XII.

A PINK BILLET-DOUX.

MR. TREMAIN had allowed George Newbold to take him away from Count Mellikoff without any great regret on his part. He acknowledged himself interested in the man and in his conversation, and at first as he listened had almost persuaded himself that his instinctive prejudice against him was ill-founded and narrow.

But as the Count continued in a perfectly passionless voice and with what seemed to Philip a grim satisfaction, his circumstantial revelations regarding Russia's power, and Russia's definition as to what constituted fatherly protection, he felt all his original

doubts reawaken; and then he had caught that momentary, searching, comprehensive malevolent expression which crept over Vladimir's face, though but for a brief second, and this had strengthened him in his dislike and suspicion.

Therefore he was glad of any excuse to leave him and return to the more commonplace, if frivolous, topics of the ladies.

In the silence and security of his own room he had promised himself a somewhat more satisfactory interview with Mdlle. Lamien than had been his portion since the accident, and with this object in view had shaken himself out of his half-mesmeric condition, and deserted the hermitage of his cynical reflections.

But this was destined to be an evening of disappointments, beginning with Patricia's frigid reception of him, and culminating in the non-appearance of Mdlle. Lamien, either at dinner or afterwards in the drawing-room. He had watched in vain for the tall dark

figure, with the falling laces half concealing the pale face and white hair, to come gliding in unnoticed, and take the accustomed place within the arched chimney-recess, the slender hands, clasped loosely together, resting on the black dress, the passionless repose of attitude marking a mind far away from the gay surroundings of the Folly.

He grew impatient at her absence, for Philip was of that temperament which, finding most things—men, women, and opportunity—come at his bidding, resented the smallest deviation from this rule, and chafed inwardly at so flagrant a dereliction to his will. He desired to see *Mdlle. Lamien* in *Patricia's* presence, and with the cool analysis of criticism, contrast her feature by feature, attribute by attribute, with that brilliant woman of the world. It had never entered into his reasoning that *Mdlle. Lamien* might frustrate his plans by the simple device of remaining invisible. He had perhaps imagined her presence compulsory, and since he had

decided that she was to be the object of his evening's pleasure or amusement, he felt doubly defrauded by her absence.

Had Mdlle. Lamien desired to feed the flame of the something more than interest already lighted in Mr. Tremain's mind concerning her, she could not have chosen a surer method. He was piqued and chagrined at her evident indifference. It was many years since any advances on his part had been met by steady rebuff. He had sustained his character of conquering hero by the very rarity of his attentions, and it gave his sensibilities something of a moral shock to find himself distanced by this cold indifferent woman, whose very position made his interest in her the more anomalous.

It was ten years ago that Patricia had flouted and dismissed him. Was he to experience like treatment at Mdlle. Lamien's hands? For though Mr. Tremain had so far scarcely admitted the nature of the interest that Mimi's governess inspired in

him, he was yet candid enough to give it a somewhat warmer title than mere curiosity in the study of a new character.

Patricia had distinctly repulsed him, though he had met her with the old love ready to reawaken at the first sign of desire on her part. Very well then, let Patricia see that he too was heart-whole and as indifferent to her as she to him. And then Mdlle. Lamien had failed to work up to his cue, and Philip felt his sharpest weapon was thus taken from him, while Patricia triumphed in her insolence and beauty.

The theatricals were to take place in the *bijou* gem of a theatre which George Newbold had had put up to please Esther, in the first year of their marriage. It was a perfect model in miniature of *La Scala*, at Milan, hung throughout with the softest shade of rose silk, a daring innovation of Esther's, which rather outvied the classic columns and severe arches, but which added a charming air of comfort and luxury, and

was as Dick Darling said, "quite far and away the most fetching thing for the complexion."

The stage was fitted completely with all possible and impossible "properties," and opened at the back into the other end of the rose-house, the opposite door of which led into the drawing-room. It was indeed a royal playhouse, and acting upon its boards became a luxurious fine art.

When Mr. Tremain entered the auditorium, he found the first two rows of stalls half filled by the house guests; Patricia had betaken herself and her train of admirers to one of the boxes, where she sat radiant and lovely, the soft rose colouring of the hangings casting a delicious tint upon her fair face and upon the shimmering surface of her dress. Philip was at once conscious of her presence, but passed her by apparently unnoticed, and made his way to the front row, where sat Esther Newbold and Dick

Darling, with an empty *fauteuil* beside the former.

Into this Mr. Tremain slipped carelessly, and with the familiarity of good-fellowship, lifted the great bouquet of roses and hyacinths that lay unheeded on Esther's lap. Dick Darling leant over and nodded her brown head at him, while Mrs. Newbold gave him one of her sweet smiles, but laid her fingers on her lips in token of silence, for *Box and Cox* held the stage, and Miss James was entering into the spirit of Mrs. Bouncer with a *verve* and sprightliness, seemingly incompatible with her usual irresponsible superciliousness.

The absurd farce played itself out amidst the chilling reproofs of Mr. Robinson, and the plaudits of the spectators, until at last the curtain dropped upon the final scene. Philip turned then to Mrs. Newbold, and restoring her flowers to her, said :

“*A propos* of nothing, Esther, whose

exquisite taste is one supposed to praise in the arrangement of your posy?"

"Ah," said Mrs. Newbold, smiling again, and touching the great jacqueminots caressingly with her fingers, "I am very proud of my bouquet, and I will give you three guesses, Philip, at the donor's name."

"Yes," broke in Dick Darling, quickly, "and I'll bet you three to five you don't guess it!"

"Those are very certain odds, Miss Dick," replied Mr. Tremain, laughing, "considering that never in the course of my long and varied experience have I been known to elucidate the simplest rebus. Even 'when is a door not a door?' is beyond my mental powers; how then can I be expected to divine who is the latest slave to Mrs. Newbold's charms? I must say however, I consider George a very amiable young man."

"So do I," laughed Esther. "Now could a wife say more? But your three guesses, Mr. Tremain."

"Miss Darling must put up the stakes first," answered Philip, "I am not going to bring my powerful legal mind to bear on this problem without first seeing the stakes. Now then, Miss Dick, out with them."

"Oh, but I have positively nothing," cried Dick Darling, her face flushed and eager. "What could I possibly have worth Mr. Tremain's 'cheese'?"

"My dear Dick!" exclaimed Esther, "you really must get out a dictionary of your own terms; your expressions, I am sure, are nowhere to be found in Lindley Murray."

"Poor old duffer!" replied the incorrigible Dick, "I hope not indeed. I guess some of them would make his hair curl, even in the cold cold grave."

Philip laughed, and Esther tried to look scandalised, but failed utterly; and then Mr. Tremain said, bending slightly forward:

"You might put up that tantalising little note, Miss Dick, that is half stowed away in your laces. I am perfectly sure it contains

‘some scandal of Queen Elizabeth,’ which would amply repay me for my unwonted efforts, if I win it. Its very colour betrays it; whoever heard of a pink *billet-doux* that was not redolent of intrigue? The more bashful the colour, the more gigantic the scandal.”

“What, this?” replied Dick, taking out a small square envelope, rose-tinted and crested. “Oh, no, this would not be worth your powder; it’s only a note from Mdlle. Lamien, and doesn’t contain a cent’s worth of intrigue, Mr. Tremain.”

“Then its looks belie it,” said Philip, “for it fills me with apprehension. Let me look at it, Miss Dick, perhaps its tangible presence may allay my terrors.”

But Dick only shook her head, and held the little note still further away.

“No, no,” she cried, “it’s not for you, Mr. Tremain, and I’m not going to give you even so much as a ‘glim’ at it.” Saying this,

she put it back in her dress, and smiled at Philip provokingly.

“I will put up this,” she exclaimed, holding out her arm, on which a ruby and diamond butterfly sparkled in a bangle setting; “and I am sure it’s simply angelic of me, for this is my one and only piece of bang-up jewellery; all real and no imitation, worth double the money. Now, Mr. Tremain, three guesses out of five; and oh, ye gods, protect my cherished bauble!”

She swung the pretty ornament between her finger and thumb, and the light from the wax-candles in the girandoles caught at it eagerly, as it shot forth rays tipped with rainbow gleams.

Mr. Tremain sat back with a mock air and sigh of fatigue, and the two women watched him interestedly; Esther with a little smile of amusement on her softly-tinted face, and Dick with a frown of anxiety knitting her forehead.

“Let me consider,” said Philip, reflectively, putting the tips of his fingers together somewhat awkwardly on account of his sling, and contemplating them attentively, “only three random shots at three-score recognised admirers! Long odds in your favour, Miss Dick. Now had I but the language of flowers at my tongue’s end, I might be able to make such conjunctions with the unwritten but supposable affinities, as to read at once the hidden meaning in the subtle juxtaposition of jacque roses and hyacinths. Question: Did the donor know any more about their meanings than I do?”

“I can supply you with posy lore, Mr. Tremain,” broke in Mrs. Newbold, “if that will be of any assistance. Know then that the red red rose expresses love, the hyacinth sport or play.”

“Ah, the one is contradictory of the other,” replied Philip, “Your nameless admirer, Esther, could scarcely be guilty of

so bold a play upon definitions as to make game of his love by his flowers. Rather let us suppose him ignorant of any deeper knowledge than their price."

"I think that an equally impertinent suggestion," answered Mrs. Newbold. "A man should never count the cost where a woman is concerned."

"Granted, my dear Esther; in theory you are absolutely right, in practice you are lamentably wrong. But I see wrath mantling on Miss Dick's brow, and scorn flashing from her eyes at our persiflage; let me appease her and make a desperate plunge into the depths of incertitude. And first of all, to be courteous and French, I throw away deliberately one chance in suggesting that it may have been *M. le mari* who sent the flowers? Ah, no, believe me, I did not need your silent denial, Esther, to be assured of my mistake; that would be far too commonplace and *bourgeois* a reading for our ethics of this nineteenth

century. The lover sinks such attentions in the husband, and is better employed in sending flowers to some other man's wife, rather than to his own."

"How very cynical you can be, Philip," exclaimed Mrs. Newbold, turning her blue eyes full upon him. "I am sure George often gives me flowers; why, these very buds I am wearing are his gift," and she touched some half-open blossoms that formed her *bouquet de corsage*.

"That was very gallant of George," replied Mr. Tremain, gravely, "especially as he had the arduous task of gathering them from his own rosery, and the virtuous satisfaction of knowing that they cost him far more than the roses of your posy cost the other fellow. Well, let me try again. Was it Freddy Slade? I have noticed that innocent youth casting furtive glances in your direction, Mrs. Esther, too often of late. It is possible that his ardour may have overstepped his prudence and

his income, and your jacques been the result."

"Wrong again, Mr. Tremain," cried Dick Darling; "oh, I do hope, with all my soul, you may miss each time."

"Considering that I have but one chance more, that is rather ungenerous, Miss Dick. I should not have believed so rancorous a spirit dwelt within your breast. To wish to further humiliate a two-thirds vanquished foe!"

"But I don't want to lose my bangle, you see," said Dick, naïvely, at which remark both Mr. Tremain and Esther laughed, and the former continued:

"Well, here goes my last and only try for your pretty bauble, Miss Dick. Was it Sir Piers Tracey? To be sure it is not quite in his line, and I never saw an Englishman yet who appreciated an American woman's love of flowers, still it might have been Sir Piers, and in that case George could not even try to appear jealous."

“Poor dear Sir Piers!” laughed Esther, “the idea of his sending any one flowers! He’s old enough to be one’s grandfather!”

“I don’t know that that makes him ineligible,” answered Mr. Tremain, “I dare say ‘old Q.’ and Beau Brummel showered roses upon the youthful Esthers of their decrepitude; it isn’t age, my dear Mrs. Esther, that counts in such things, it’s temperament.”

“Well, in any case I am glad you have not won my bangle,” cried Dick Darling, as she slipped it over her dimpled wrist. “I always make it a point to pay up my debts of honour on the spot, I can’t bear a ‘Welcher,’ so you would have been obliged to take my ruby fly, had you been successful, Mr. Tremain, and that would have been death to me, simply death.”

“With such an alternative, Miss Dick,” replied Philip, with increased gravity, and bowing across Esther, “I am devoutly thankful to have lost, for to have been the indirect

cause of your untimely decease, would have branded me for ever in my own eyes !”

Then Mrs. Newbold said time was up, and she must go ; the *Ladies' Battle* would be called in five minutes, and she was wanted behind the scenes ; was Mr. Tremain going through with his rôle ?

But Philip begged off on account of his still lame wrist which he wore bandaged and in a sling ; it would be quite effort enough to act when the real representation took place, Mr. Robinson could read his lines and he would imbibe valuable hints from his superior method. Was Mdlle. Lamien to take the Countess d'Autreval's part ?

“No,” replied Esther, fingering her roses a trifle nervously, and looking at him from under her eyelids, “Miss Hildreth has elected to act her own rôle at the rehearsal, consequently Mdlle. Lamien's services will not be required. Ah, Patricia has already left her box, I must go,” she added, hastily ; and with a hurried gesture she walked towards a side

exit, her pale pink draperies sweeping after her, and making a little *frou-frou* with their silks and laces.

Mr. Tremain reseated himself, changing his *fauteuil* for the one Esther had vacated next to Miss Darling. He leant back negligently and turning his face towards that young lady said carelessly :

“Since we neither of us appear on the boards, Miss Dick, let us console one another off them. By the way, where is Miss James ? I did not see her come into the theatre after her very capital bit of acting.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” answered Miss Darling, with a shrug of her shoulders. “I suppose she is improving her mind somewhere, at the expense of some one. To speak frankly, Mr. Tremain, Rosalie and I are bad friends just now, and I give her as wide a berth as possible.”

“Oh, indeed,” answered Philip, rather bored, and not at all understanding that he was the cause of this bad friendship, since

Dick, reading Rosalie's schemes and wishes, had denounced them hotly; and Miss James, with the remembrance of Perkins's slighting remarks still fresh, had replied with equal vigour; and so the breach widened between them day by day.

Dick sat silent for several moments, the colour coming and going in her cheeks; she was a very chivalrous little girl, and her whole heart had gone out in unreasoning admiration to Patricia, when first she saw her; her beauty, her brilliancy, her sparkling vivacity making an absolute captive of the maiden, who, as she looked at her, felt all her own shortcomings rise up and confront her in formidable array.

She had heard the story of Philip's and Patricia's engagement, and its unhappy termination, and she had secretly admired him, in her own mind, for a long time, and had felt Patricia's reception of him as a personal injury, which she longed to put right by a few judicious words. She felt sure they

would be judicious because they would be honest. Now if he would only name Patricia, only ask some question, no matter how trivial, that she might introduce this one absorbing subject.

But Mr. Tremain, with that perverted obstinacy so often displayed, which consists in saying the wrong thing at the right moment, when he did speak, propounded a question so diametrically opposite to Dick Darling's thoughts that that young lady was actually taken aback, and stared at him blankly for a full second without answering. And yet Philip had only inquired if Miss Dick could say why Mdlle. Lamien had not appeared that evening? It was a simple enough question, but Miss Darling seemed incapable of replying to it, so he spoke again.

"My dear Miss Dick, what have I said? You look as though you had either not heard, or not understood me. Pray let me repeat myself. Can you tell me why Mdlle. Lamien has absented herself all this evening?"

Miss Darling by this time had come back from her vain imaginings, and answered him readily enough.

“Oh, I beg your pardon ; I guess I must have been ‘in Japan’ when you first spoke. Why hasn’t Mdlle. Lamien come down this evening ? For a very simple reason : she has gone away.”

“Gone away !” echoed Philip. “But I saw her late this afternoon in the corridor.” He did not add, and *heard* her ; since, if Esther Newbold spoke truly, it was she who had startled him by her sad, monotonous song, and her voice that had an echo of Patty’s in its notes.

“Oh, no doubt,” replied Miss Darling, “she only went away while we were at dinner ; I heard the wheels of the dog-cart just as we had eaten our way up to the *suprême de volaille*.”

“Is she to be gone long ?” asked Philip, conscious and yet astonished at the feeling of loss this news created in him.

"I really don't know," replied Dick, looking a little surprised. "She left this note for me," taking out the pink envelope from its hiding-place and showing it to him. He bent forward eagerly to scan it as it lay on her outstretched palm, the superscription hidden, the reverse side lying uppermost. On this he saw impressed a tiny coronet and a twisted cypher, "*A. de L.*"

"It only tells me about some fancy work she undertook for me," continued Dick, drawing back her hand with the note, "and thanks me rather over much for my 'unvarying kindness.' She might stow that," she concluded, with a grimace.

But Mr. Tremain had eyes and thoughts only for the little note, and its dainty, aristocratic heraldry.

"Is she a titled *émigrée* in disguise?" he asked, pointing to the monogram and coronet; then, with an effort, as he became aware of Miss Darling's surprised looks, and speaking more lightly: "This grows ex-

citing, Miss Dick ; who knows ?—we may have the elements of a three volume novel ready to our hands, yet lose them all by blundering. What do you know about Mdlle. Lamien ?”

“Only what Esther has told us all, which you heard, I think. As to her being titled, if you think this indicates it,” pointing to the embellishments on the pink note, “why you know, they go for nothing. It may be only a blind, or it may be that Mdlle. Lamien prefers to write on other people’s note-paper. I don’t think it’s very conclusive evidence one way or the other.”

And Miss Darling got up with almost an impatient air.

“I am going to change my seat,” she said, “I want to go further back, where I can better see and admire Miss Hildreth. But before I go, Mr. Tremain, I will tell you who sent Esther the roses, it was Mdlle. Lamien ; a sentimental and too extravagant outburst of gush on her part, wasn’t it ?”

Too surprised to reply, Mr. Tremain

made way for Miss Darling, escorting her to a back row, where George Newbold received her with *empressement*, and Jack Howard with unqualified relief.

“Give you my word,” he whispered in her ear, “I have been bored to death, Miss Dick; so glad to have you back again!”

But Miss Darling proved very poor company, and Jack Howard for once voted her tiresome.

“Stupid blind mole!” declared Dick to herself, as Philip made his bow and left her. “Can’t he see how lovely Patricia has grown, that he must run after that pale Russian woman? Oh, what idiots men are!” and Miss Darling consoled herself by reducing poor Jack to the verge of despair by her sharp retorts and acrid replies.

Quite late in the evening, after the rehearsal was over, and the little theatre empty, Count Vladimir opened the double doors and stepped within Melpomene’s deserted temple. The lights had not yet

been put out, and the stage scenery stood unchanged from the last act; an air of late occupancy, and a memory of brilliant accessories, of fair women in their sheen of jewels and gleam of satins still lingered, to which the empty seats and deserted stage pointed the moral of all transitory glory.

Vladimir stood for a moment contemplating the scene, a fine smile curving his lips, the light of recent conquest lingering in his eyes.

"I am too late," he murmured; "the drama is played out seemingly, the actors fled. Ah, well, I can afford to wait."

Then he went forward a few steps, and as he did so his quick eye evidently detected something unexpected, for he made his way definitely towards the back row of stalls, stooping when he came to the last but one, and lifted from the carpet a folded square of paper. He held it up to the light; it was an envelope, pink in hue, and embellished on the smooth satin surface by a tiny coronet and a

twisted cypher. It was Dick Darling's rose-coloured *billet-doux*.

Vladimir Mellikoff made no movement of surprise or triumph, but as he took out his black note-book and laid the envelope safely within its pages, the smile deepened on his lips and in his eyes. He turned and walked swiftly away, letting the double doors close noiselessly behind him.

The little theatre was once more deserted ; the wax-lights flickered in the still air ; the rose silk draperies stirred slightly as a passing breath of soft spring wind floated in from the rose house, bringing a wave of perfume from the golden blossoms over which it had lingered in its passage. The mimic comedy was played out, the actors had abandoned their rôles ; only real life and its human tragedy remained uncompleted, across which none but the Divine hand dare write the word *finis*.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE HAZEL COPSE.

MR. TREMAIN, after leaving Miss Darling in the safe custody of George Newbold, walked hastily out of the theatre by a side entrance, and making his way along a narrow and dimly lighted corridor, came to a small door opening on to an outside terrace which ran beneath the library windows, and from which a flight of steps led to the large flower garden—Esther Newbold's particular hobby.

He stepped out on to the terrace, shutting the door behind him, and drawing a deep breath of relief at being once more alone. It was a charming night; the cool fresh west wind swept by him in fitful gusts, touched

with a warmer breath of the south, and laden with all the mystery of the thousands of miles it had travelled ere it reached this fair spot of God's creation. It could not linger to unfold its burden of knowledge; it could but flutter its dark soft wings and pass on in the orbit of its destiny, leaving its mystery unsolved, its secrets unrevealed, and murmuring ever as it went, sweeping up amidst the tall, waving trees, or bending low to caress the sleeping flowers, telling its message always and ever—its message of the passing of Time, of the coming of Eternity.

“The stars heard it, and the sea,
And the answering aisles of the dim woods.”

Only man, whose ears are not as yet finely enough attuned to the music of the spheres, heard no hidden meaning in its gentle voice, no celestial trumpet-call in its rude blasts.

Why should Nature reveal her most priceless secrets to man, since as yet, his

highest attainment is a disbelief in all things beyond his finite wisdom, and a cavilling at what he calls the useless machinery of organic life? Nature is as shy as she is beautiful; generous when trusted, but niggardly when discredited. How shall the wilfully blind expect to see into her mysteries, or the wilfully deaf hear the lilt of her charming?

Below the terrace lay the garden beds, wrapt about in a dreamy haze, out of which the crescent moon, set high in the intense blue of the heavens, evoked spectral gleams of gold and silver as it fell athwart the yellow daffodils, hanging their heavy heads down to their shrouding green sheath-like leaves; or where the sweet narcissus raised its white disk, distilling its rich perfume far into the night, and recalling the beautiful Boeotian youth, whose tragic fate seemed written on each silver petal.

“Narcissi, fairest of them all,
Who gaze on their eyes in the stream’s recess,
Till they die of their own dear loveliness.”

Here, too, blossomed the luscious double violet, hidden beneath its close growing leaves, mingling its dainty perfume with the more pungent exhalations of the tiny musk plant and lily-of-the-valley, while the pale blue-eyed forget-me-not was lost in the shadows, as were the star of Bethlehem, and the delicate classic cups of the crocus, only their bolder yellow rims catching, now and then, a fleeting moonbeam.

A grove of sycamore trees threw up their graceful branches against the luminous darkness, while the chestnuts swayed their half-opened downy pink and white buds, and the maples fluttered their long, tendril-like pods, cased in verdant green, and as rhythmical as lightly strung Eastern prayer-beads. The faint early verdure of the lilac was just discernible, and in one of the dark oak-trees a little mother bird, wakened by the brilliant moonlight, crooned out a plaintive note to her mate, who answered her by the soft fluttering of his brown wings.

And then all was still, but not silent; for the great wonderful night is filled with the sweet harmonies of the invisible world, whose cadences are too faint and tender to be heard among the clarion chords of the day, but which possess an infinitude of euphony that seems borrowed from the heavenly choirs of the New Jerusalem.

Mr. Tremain coming suddenly—from the artificiality of the miniature *La Scala*, with its rose-coloured hangings, its wax tapers, its atmosphere laden with the manufactured perfumes of chypre, jockey-club, duchesse; and its stage, on which the mimic actors travestied the passions of real life; its audience, made up of fair women, whose costly robes were more priceless in their eyes than the ruder virtues of truth and honour; of men, whose natural abilities were buried beneath a fashionable languor, and whose moral nature was stunted and undeveloped by the blighting curse of their century, love of gold and desire of its

possession—into the immensity and candour of the night—felt as if dealt a blow, and stopped involuntarily, swayed by some unknown emotion that strove against the one influence and yearned towards the other.

He stepped down from the terrace, and wandered aimlessly along the broad garden paths, his hands clasped loosely behind him, his bare head bent forward, the April wind stirring the short brown locks that fell over his forehead. Now and then he stooped down and looked carefully at some half-hidden blossom, drawing back the leaves with heedful fingers, and smiling at his own childishness as he passed on, not rifling even one bud from the parent stem.

The garden paths were all broad and straight, and Philip walked on, unheeding his steps and unmindful of his course. He was very deep in thought, so deep that presently he forgot to notice the flowers on either side, passing on without halting at any favoured one. Dick Darling's bald

news—that Mdlle. Lamien had left the Folly—and her apparent ignorance as to her return, had opened Philip's eyes with a start, and revealed to him the distance he had already travelled in the primrose path of dalliance and uncertainty.

He acknowledged to himself, with a twinge of mortification, that her leaving the house in such a manner, and without any word to him as to her intention, was a wound to his self-love and self-esteem. Though, indeed, why Mdlle. Lamien should have confided her plans to him was an open question. He had met her but once face to face since the accident, and that opportunity had resolved itself into the unsatisfactory interview in the corridor, when she had scorned his hand, and swept by him down the stairs without a word.

Poor Philip! it was rather rough treatment, as he said to himself, to have his hand refused twice in the same evening by two different women! A smile of self-scorn and amusement came to his lips as he recalled

the incident ; fate was not usually so unkind, he was not accustomed to such churlish treatment at her hands, and the very novelty set him speculating as to the motives that incited two such opposite natures to a similarity of action.

Self analysis is a very deceitful occupation, and Mr. Tremain, who had set about an interior examination as to his own feelings and intentions regarding Mdlle. Lamien, was soon wandering far afield in the realms of speculation regarding the ulterior motives of these two women, comparing their various attributes, contrasting their characteristics, finding subtle likenesses between them, and antagonistic points of approachment. Then he recalled the little pink note, and the bouquet of jacque roses, and Dick Darling's sarcastic criticism upon them. Why should Mdlle. Lamien use coroneted note-paper if it was not her own ? And why should Mimi's governess waste her scanty substance upon hot-house flowers for Esther Newbold, who certainly could better

afford the luxury than her paid dependent? And did not Mdlle. Lamien know the meaning hidden in the blossoms? Had she some reason for selecting red roses and white hyacinths, or was it only a coincidence, an accident?

“Were I a little more of a fatalist,” thought Philip, “I should answer my own question by reminding myself that nothing is accident in life. In their cult, *kismet* overrules and becomes destiny.”

Meantime, taking no heed to his steps, Mr. Tremain was surprised into consciousness by a sharp blow in the face, which recalled him to a survey of his surroundings. He found he had wandered far beyond the garden precincts, down a gentle declivity ending in a lightly-wooded copse, to which a low-hanging hazel-tree branch barred his entrance. Putting this aside, he entered the small enclosure; it was not more than an acre in extent, the trees with which it was planted being still young, and standing

rather wide apart. The ground beneath was of yielding though uneven turf, and quite at the far end of the tiny wood a rustic bench was placed near a small fountain with a marble basin, into which the water, trickling from a vase held in the marble boy Narcissus's uplifted hands, made a pleasant murmur in the stillness of the night.

A gleam of white drapery falling across the bench warned Philip that he was trespassing upon a rendezvous, that had all the recognised characteristics of an assignation. He had gone too far, however, to retreat, since his presence must have been already announced by the harsh crackling of the offending hazel-bough, some of the twigs having broken in his hand as he pushed it back.

The white figure neither moved nor showed any knowledge of his approach, but remained absolutely motionless, the head and shoulders in deep shadow, only the gloved hands and the sweeping draperies catching reflections

from the fitful moonlight. If it was an assignation, the lady apparently was the only one faithful to the tryst, for there was no manly form beside her, nor manly accents raised in pleading or caress; indeed, voices of any *timbre* there were not. A silence, deep and profound, held the little wood as in a spell, and the white-robed figure with the folded hands might have been the enchanted Princess, and Philip the Prince who was to wake her with a kiss, whose very sweetness would open the door once again to the outside world of romance, and passion, and disappointment.

Poor Princess! let her dream on a little longer, wrapped in her unconscious, visionless slumber; the malignant fairy's curse of a hundred years ago is fast wearing itself away, and with love's awakening who can banish the twin sisters of jealousy and suspicion? Does not the fairest rose of all the garden fair bear within its flushing bosom the canker worm of deceit and decay?

Treading noiselessly upon the short turf, Mr. Tremain came close upon the fair intriguer before she heard his footsteps, or was aware of his presence. The moon, which had been slightly obscured by the passing of some hazy clouds, now broke forth and shone down full upon the slight upright figure that had arisen hastily, and taken a forward step or two, as Philip's approach became known. The silver rays touched with seeming tenderness the dark hair rolled high upon the little head, and fell across the white neck, half concealed by a fleecy drapery, gathered together carelessly, and held by one slender hand in a long loose glove; they struck cool and sharp on the sweeping lines of the dress, accentuating each fold of the silken texture, and threw into bold relief the soft pallor of the delicately-rounded face, lingering longest where the dark brows made a mystery of the eyes, and kissing the curved lips that now were set and defiant; illuminating and defining each gracious curve and outline of the grace-

ful form, with the same ethereal brilliancy that transformed the trickling fountain into an elixir of life, and awakened the boy-god Narcissus into perennial youthfulness.

Mr. Tremain stopped spellbound ; and for a moment's space, in the hush that fell between them, each could hear the quick-drawn breath of the other, while the tinkling drops from Narcissus's vase became a Niagara in sound and volume. Then the spell was broken, as both, with involuntary impulse, spoke the other's name.

“ Patricia ! ”

“ Philip ! ”

The woman was the first to recover her composure ; with a nervous laugh, that rang a little untrue, and in a slightly strained voice, she broke the embarrassment of the moment.

“ So you, too, have caught the fever of unrest, Mr. Tremain, and become moon-struck under the influence of Luna's fool's month. For myself, I have always asserted

that the blood of the wandering tribes flows in my veins, the night-time and the dark hours have always been my favourite times for——”

“A rendezvous,” struck in Philip, sharply. “I have not forgotten any of your pet peculiarities, you see. Perhaps I intrude, however; the hour and scene demand a Romeo for your Juliet, and I can scarcely hope to fill the part to your liking.”

She started as though he had struck her, but made answer calmly enough:

“You are too modest, Mr. Tremain, by far; it is a new development in your character, pardon me if it strikes me as somewhat ludicrous.” And she laughed lightly and coldly, though with a ring of bitterness below the mocking notes.

But Philip was not angered by her words or her laughter; he scarcely heard the latter, so eagerly were his eyes devouring each feature and line of the once dearly worshipped face and form.

Surely the cheeks were a trifle more wan and hollow than in the old days, despite the delicate rouge tinting that lay upon them; and the eyes were deeper set, the shadows beneath them darker, their expression more weary and unsatisfied than when last he had looked into their violet depths; and had not the perfect modelling of her figure grown somewhat thinner and more shrunken?

He, who remembered her in the full glory and pride of her youthful beauty, and who had loved her in it, noted now with keenest vision each change that time had wrought upon it. And as he gazed the old old passion leapt into life again; his heart grew tender and longing, his love of ten years ago awoke from its long slumber, and clamoured for its resurrection. And yet, mingling with this tumult of emotion, overweighing it, and pressing it back, was a strange, intangible, inexplicable power that evolved itself out of a future of unknown presentiment, even as it seemed but the forecast of a dread calamity.

But Philip was not one to be swayed by unseen influences; he shook off the impression of supernatural agencies and resolved to snatch at this one hour, which chance had thrown in his way, and wring from it whatever of joy or sweetness could be gathered from the withered blossoms and crushed buds of the past.

He stood face to face with Patricia once more; might not he, remembering Esther Newbold's pleadings, even now after ten long years of separation, gather sufficient fruit from off the golden trees of past youth and love, to make happy and contented the downward years of life? Could a man stand thus, looking into the eyes of the woman of his lifelong devotion, and remain indifferent? Would not any sop from out that gilded past, if thrown to him by her hand, prove of sufficient value to be worth his glad acceptance?

All this time his eyes had never left her face, and she grew restive under the intensity of his scrutiny, flushing and paling, while

the hand that held the fleecy drapery about her throat and neck trembled.

“Patty,” he said at last, in a voice set in a lower key than usual. “Patty, it is ten long years since we stood thus, alone together. Do you remember the last time we met and—parted?”

She did not answer him at first, but moved away from him some paces, and halted beside the fountain; the marble rim that surrounded the basin was broad and high, she seated herself upon it, and turning her face looked upward at Philip, who had followed her.

Not more cold, or hard, or irresponsive was the face of the boy Narcissus behind her, than was the fair impassive beauty of her face. The springing jet of water had ceased to flow, and only a few drops fell now and then from the upheld vase; they seemed like echoes from the past years falling slowly, slowly, one by one.

When she spoke her voice was calm and

composed, though Philip, accustomed to its fuller cadences, caught here and there a flat note in its ebb and flow.

“I find you are as inconsequent and as tactless as ever, Philip,” she said ; and though she dropped her previous formality of address, his name gained nothing in her using of it. “You were always a sad bungler ; fancy reminding a woman of her existence ten years ago ! And then expecting her to remember her words and actions at that time ! My dear Philip you are speaking of ancient history ; why not tell me at once that Queen Anne is dead, and expect me to be astonished ? A woman remembers nothing of her past, save her conquests and her gowns. The one tells upon her vanity, the other tells upon her purse.”

She laughed again, lightly ; and drawing off her glove dipped one hand in the dark water, stirring its surface into a hundred rippling smiles, and scattering the drops in a shower of prismatic spherules.

“I know it is the fashion of your world, Patricia,” Philip replied, quietly, “to scoff at all things ; so narrow are the limits of this nineteenth-century philosophy that what we cannot understand we disbelieve, what we do not wish to recall we deny, and what we are forced to accept we despise. It is a cruel creed even for men, on the lips of a woman it becomes detestable. You may scoff as you please, Patricia, you cannot change or alter the old laws of God ; as long as man is man and woman, woman, memory and remorse must have a place within their consciousness ; and no matter how hard or callous you may have grown, or how learned in the world’s theology, you cannot entirely quench the attributes bestowed upon you, when you became not only a beautiful creation, but a woman of soul and reason. The last ten years cannot be a blank to you, any more than our last meeting and parting can be.”

Miss Hildreth laughed again, and wiping her slender finger-tips upon a tiny square of

lace and muslin, from whose folds an odour of violets stole forth, she answered in an even lighter tone :

“My dear Philip, let me recommend to you a certain essay on the ‘Art of Forgetting,’ if you have not already read it. It is written by a modern philosopher, it is true, but nevertheless, he sounds the heights and depths of our social system, and evolves a theory therefrom for which he should receive an universal peerage, bestowed upon him by his indebted fellow-sufferers. In the art of forgetting lies one’s only chance of freedom from remorse for the past, and the inconveniences of the future. Believe me, if we can only master thoroughly this hitherto neglected art, we need have no further fears either for our digestions or complexions. It was, I think, old Sir Piers who said that all one’s nightmares, physical or moral, arose from one of two causes, an unruly liver, or a too vivid memory ; let us give the old

man the credit of the aphorism, in any case."

"Since you are so willingly blind, Patricia," cried Philip, roused from his apparent calm by the cool impertinence of her replies, "it seems a pity to force you to recall a past that dates back ten years. And yet I fear I must do so, for there are certain things that had better be explained between us now. Who knows but twice ten years may come and go before we meet again?"

He paused for a moment, but she made him no reply; her face and slim graceful figure were thrown into high relief against the dark hazel-trees, her silks and laces lay about her feet in careless profusion across the short green turf, her hands were folded in the lace scarf that wrapped her neck in its fleecy folds. Afar off in the darkness of the drooping branches, an owl hooted, and a bird or two answered in sleepy half-notes.

“It is not so very long ago,” Philip continued, “since a letter came to me from you.”

She shivered a little and drew her laces about her more closely.

“In that letter, Patricia, you had forgotten nothing; not one detail of the dream we dreamed together ten years ago. You wrote from your heart then; your heart that will sometimes make its cry heard, despite the crust of worldly artifice and selfishness you have built up upon it, and you appealed to me to recall the old days, ‘to fold back the cere-cloth from the face of our dead past,’ and see if something of beauty and sentiment did not still cling to its memory.”

She put up one hand to her face and passed it hurriedly across her trembling lips; she did not speak, but her eyes grew large and dark in their entreaty. Mr. Tremain continued, unheeding either her eyes or gesture.

“I am not going to quote further from

that letter, Patricia, and I will only tax your patience a very little longer, while I describe to you two visions conjured up by your appeal. I saw once more you, in your first fresh loveliness and beauty, radiant with youth, transformed by love; and I saw myself, as yet a raw, unfinished, unformed specimen of manhood; the Creighton of a suburban society, it is true, but nevertheless the veriest tyro in the affectations and niceties of town etiquette. You came within my circle, and you charmed me by the sweet graciousness of your beauty, the blue fire of your eyes, the frank candour of your witcheries. And you—you were content to let me play Strephon to your Chloe. And so that vision faded; and when next I saw you in fancy, you came towards me, from out a world of light beyond, from whence came also the echo of gay laughter and light jest; the silks and laces of your dress fell about you jealously, I remember their colour and their sheen, as you crept up to me,

trembling. There was no glad exclamation on your lips, no joy in your eyes, no hand held out in welcome ; hesitating and uncertain you stood before me, looking at me from under your down-cast lids, and drawing one hand slowly over the other. And I, loving and eager, I, a very fool in love, never dreamed the reason of your changed demeanour ; no, not until hours afterwards, when the night and the falling rain had cooled my passion. You were ashamed of me, Patty, ashamed of your rustic lover, who came into your presence with a heart on fire, but wearing an ill-fitting coat, and with manners more pronounced and enthusiastic than those of your little court in the room beyond."

He stopped and walked away from her a few paces. The woman thus left alone seated on the marble fountain rim, never moved or spoke ; only a low cry burst from her lips, smothered as soon as born, otherwise she remained as still and silent as the Bœotian marble god behind her, whose proto-

type had lived out all the passion and the pain of loving so many centuries ago.

The moon above drifted from cloud to cloud, flinging its silver fire down recklessly upon the sheltered nook, and upon the fair woman miserable in the midst of her loveliness. Mr. Tremain turned and came back, he drew close to her and stood silent for some moments; the pity that filled his soul, revealed in his eyes down bent upon her. After a time he spoke, and his voice had regained its usual level tones.

“That was all, Patty, a very commonplace ending. You were ashamed of me; ashamed of my outward appearance, which lacked the correct finish of a Bond Street tailor; ashamed of my eagerness and my passion, and my open adoration; ashamed of my poverty, and afraid of it. Poor pretty Patty! poor little butterfly of fashion! What should it know of the coarser insects of creation, whose existence was as necessary perhaps, but less ornamental, than its own? Why

should it break its pretty painted wings in trying to soar above the sunshine of the hour? You rejected me, Patricia, that was the end of our last interview; you rejected me and scorned me, and cast me from you when tired of your toy, and when you had wounded me beyond healing, and flouted my love and constancy. You asked me to kiss you for good-bye; I think that was the bitterest moment of all my life, Patty, it was such wanton cruelty, such selfish triumphing. And I went from you with all the love and hope and trust and belief of youth crushed out of my heart by your two soft little hands. Who could have thought they had the strength to deal one such a coward's blow?"

Again he stopped, but still she remained still and silent, the whiteness of her face growing strange and unfamiliar in the fitful moonbeams.

"That was our last meeting and parting, Patricia, and it happened ten years ago. And you would have me believe that you have

so mastered the art of forgetting as to make of it all only a blank chaos !”

He came nearer to her, and moving with careful hand the folds of her dress sat down beside her on the broad marble brim. Seated thus, side by side, his eyes were on a level with hers, and he read within their depths so great a misery as to call forth a fuller pity in his own.

“Patty,” he said, very quietly, “Patty, my answer to your letter was cold and hard, unworthy of me. Will you forget it, my dear, and let me give you my true answer now, with your head upon my heart, and my lips on yours, as in the old days, Patty? The old beautiful days when the world and our love was young. Patty, my little wayward Patty, come back to my love and to me.”

He held out his arms and would have drawn her to him, so sure was he of her answer. But she, springing up, stood tall and dignified before him, her bosom, from

which the lace wrap had fallen, heaving with her hurriedly drawn breath, the whiteness of her uncovered neck and arms gleaming like alabaster, as she stood silhouetted against the sombre boughs of the hazel-trees behind her. Her eyes flashed with their old fire, she raised one hand in her old favourite imperious gesture, and when she spoke the tones of her voice had grown round and full and musical.

“No, Philip,” she cried, “you come too late. What! you think you have but to throw the handkerchief and I will run gladly to pick it up? You are willing to accept me now, because for some concealed reason of your own, I appear more desirable in your eyes, better worth the having, and so you read me a long monologue on your constancy and love, and my faithlessness and cruelty. But you forget to put in the finer shading to the picture, Philip; you forget the part *you* played in our drama *à deux*; you forget how eagerly you snatched at the

freedom I offered; you forget your harsh words, your rough manners, your imperious demands, your impatient flying to conclusions. You wilfully misunderstood me then, Philip, you wilfully misread a girl's most natural shrinking from the unknown and the untried, and put it down to heartless coquetry and deceit. Was it for me to set you right? Was I to plead my own cause? No, Philip, you have scorned me twice; once when you refused my kiss, ten years ago, and again when you refused my offer in my letter. I will not accept now a love born out of pity, an interest created by desire. I will have all or nothing; pity shall have nothing to say or plead on my behalf."

She threw out her hands passionately.

"Take back your offer, Philip; make it to some less jealous, less wise woman. I will have none of it. I have seen many strange things in my wanderings of ten years, gained many bitter experiences,

mingled with many strange people, touched close on terrible tragedies; but one thing I have never lost throughout all—my pride and my freedom. Go, Philip, you have your answer in my farewell words of ten years ago. I have no room to remember. I have mastered the art of forgetfulness and oblivion.”

With one quick movement she stooped, drew the long folds of her shining draperies about her, gathering her laces in one hand, and swept by him swiftly; the moonlight clinging to her as she moved, surrounded her as with a halo, and lighted up the fine scorn that curved her lips and glowed in her deep eyes.

In another moment the elastic swaying hazel-boughs parted to receive her, and then springing back, hid the slight graceful figure from Philip's sight.

And still the drops falling from the vase, held high in the hands of the boy-god Narcissus, counted out the moments,

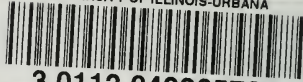
and the moonbeams fell straight and long, in narrow shafts, across the spot where Patricia had leant her fair form, stirring to sudden life with her jewelled fingers the water's placid dark surface.

Now she was gone, and the radiance departed with her.

END OF VOL. I.



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